NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 348. *Price, Five Cents.*

NICK CARTER'S BATTLE AGAINST ODDS

OR THE MYSTERY OF THE DETROIT PAWNBROKER

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."

"YOUR PAL IS AT MY MERCY," SAID NICK CARTER. "IF YOU APPROACH I WILL CUT HIS HEAD FROM HIS BODY."

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NICK CARTER'S BATTLE AGAINST ODDS;

OR,

The Mystery of the Detroit Pawnbroker.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

MURDER OF WASHINGTON COON.

A young woman dashed out of a house on Grand River Avenue, Detroit, and ran across the street, bare-headed, with her hair streaming in the wind.

She was in such haste that she did not stop to close the door behind her; but rushed breathlessly up the steps of the house opposite, and began pulling the knocker with all her force.

It was after eleven o'clock, and most of the house-keepers in the neighborhood were asleep.

She was too excited to notice that a tall man, who had been striding up the street, had paused for a breath to look at her.

Then he came up the steps.

"Is that you, Mary?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

The girl started, shrieking at the sound of his voice.

"Oh, doctor!" she cried, in horrified tones, "Mr. Coon has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" faltered Dr. Sanders. "When—where?"

"In his own house," cried the girl, bursting into tears. "Oh, I'm so frightened!"

The doctor opened his door, called his manservant, Henry, and with him and Mary, made his way across the street.

There was a light in the hallway of the house, and the door of the room opening at the side was open.

Mary stopped at the door of this room.

"He is in there," she said, stepping aside.

The doctor and his man entered the room, which was dark, save for the light which came in by the doorway.

The gas-jet threw a stream of light across the carpet the width of the doorway, and in the center of this lighted space was the body of an old man lying in a pool of blood.

The man lay upon his face, with his legs doubled under him, in front of a chair, from which he had fallen.

The assassin had evidently crept up behind and dealt the blow with an ax, and with such force that it had been driven to the base of the brain.

Dr. Sanders looked at the murdered man, then shook his head in a professional way.

"Where is your mistress?" he called to the girl, who remained outside the door.

"I suppose she is asleep."

"You had better call her."

Mary was afraid to go upstairs alone, and after he had been directed by his master to secure the street door, and had done so, Henry followed her.

The doctor stood leaning against the door post, looking calmly at the body of Mr. Coon, until he was startled by a shrieking above.

An instant later Henry called the doctor's name.

"Mrs. Coon has been killed!" he cried, in tones of alarm.

The doctor hastened upstairs.

Mrs. Coon, who was much younger than her husband, was in bed.

There was blood upon her face, and all the noise of the servants had not aroused her.

She was not dead, however, and the doctor soon announced the fact to Mary, who continued to shriek in a corner of the room.

"Go across the street, and fetch my case of medicines," ordered Dr. Sanders.

Henry disappeared, to return in an amazingly short time, when he was dispatched by the doctor to call the police.

"And you can wait and telephone to Silas Coon," said the doctor.

After his man had left upon his second errand, the doctor quickly dressed the wound upon Mrs. Coon's head, which was not serious; and then mixed, and with Mary's assistance, adminstered a potion.

He had just completed this operation when there was a ring at the bell, and he went downstairs to answer it, leaving the domestic to watch her still unconscious mistress.

Mrs. Sanders was at the door.

She took a look at the murdered man, and after some expressions and a good many questions, went upstairs to attend upon Mrs. Coon.

The doctor remained by the dead man, waiting for the arrival of assistance.

In the interval, a few particulars regarding Mr. Coon may be given.

Mr. Washington Coon was about sixty years of age; he had been a pawnbroker in Detroit for many years; but had lately retired from business in favor of an only son, Silas.

The old man had amassed a good deal of wealth by not over-clean ways, and when he had seen fit to marry a young wife, about a year before the opening of this story, his son had felt himself aggrieved.

A quarrel had followed, and for some time parent and son had not spoken.

Mrs. Coon was a very handsome woman, the daughter of a lawyer, who had done legal business for the old pawnbroker.

Her father had died, leaving her at the age of twenty entirely unprovided for.

Coon had asked her to marry him, and she had consented; but they had not lived very happy together.

Kate Adair, as Coon very well knew, when he had asked her to be his wife, had loved another.

This was a young man of her own age, named George Packer.

Packer was a wild, handsome fellow, given to dissipation, which had finally ended in his killing a gambler over a game of cards.

It was some question whether Packer had not been forced to shoot in self-defense, and the judge, in consideration of this, made the sentence as light as possible.

He had gone to prison, however, and before his term was half over Kate had married Washington Coon.

Dr. Sanders was thinking of Mrs. Coon's former lover, and that she would now be in condition to marry him, if she thought fit, when the door bell rang, and he went to answer it.

Mr. Silas Coon and a policeman were upon the steps.

Silas was an unpleasant-looking man, with one glass eye, which, judging from the little similarity it bore to the real one, must have been received as a pawn by the present owner, and remained long on his hands unredeemed.

He had very black, stiff hair, with a thin beard, and a heavy body set upon crooked legs.

He extended his hand, which the doctor shook in a formal manner, muttering something about "very sad affair."

Then they proceeded directly to the room where the body lay.

As Silas Coon looked at his father, the sweat started upon his face, and he turned very pale.

After a moment he started, stepped back, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Has his wife been told of this?" he asked, after a moment.

Dr. Sanders explained the manner in which he had found Mrs. Coon.

Silas looked at him, his one eye gleaming.

"You think she was drugged?" he said.

"Yes; I do."

"I don't believe it," cried Silas, violently.

The doctor started, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd like to see her," said Silas. "She must know something about this. Where is the girl?"

"She is upstairs," said the doctor. "I will go up, and see how Mrs. Coon is getting along."

As he left the room Silas followed him quickly, appearing to forget all about the dead body which lay upon the parlor floor.

They found Mrs. Coon up and dressed, and crying faintly under the ministrations of the doctor's wife.

"So you say you were drugged?" exclaimed Silas, without a word of salutation, and looking at his stepmother, with an ugly sneer.

"I?" cried the poor woman, appearing astonished. "I have said nothing about it."

"And you pretend you heard nothing when my father was killed?"

"My dear sir," whispered the doctor, buttonholing him aside, "not so rough—not so rough."

Silas began to say something, but, looking up, his eye encountered the figure of a man at the door.

"Oh!" he said, "come in."

The newcomer walked, or rather glided, for his movements were all furtive, into the room.

He was a stockly-built man, with red hair, and a nose which had been driven flat to his face by some accident.

As the doctor saw this individual he started, and looked at Silas Coon questioningly.

"I had him come down and look around," said Silas. "We can't begin too early in these matters."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, while the newcomer took a good look at the ladies.

Mrs. Coon had commenced to cry again into her handkerchief, and the doctor's wife was whispering consolations in her ear.

"Hypocrisy," whispered Coon, shrilly, into the ear of the man with the flattened nose. "Has a bad look, eh?"

The newcomer winked, and shook his head with all imaginable shrewdness.

Mrs. Coon had overheard Silas' remark, and she arose, said something to her friend, and started to leave the room. Silas' coarse voice stopped her.

"Wait a moment, if you please," he said. "This gentleman is a detective—Mr. Slump."

Mr. Slump bowed.

"And I had him come down here to look into this lamentable affair."

"Exactly so," supplemented Slump.

"If you cannot wait until morning I suppose I must listen," answered Mrs. Coon.

"Well, then," Slump began, "you were asleep when this murder was committed?"

"I was."

"Did you hear any noise about the house?"

"No, sir."

"What time did you go to bed?"

"Half-past nine."

"Where was Mr. Coon at the time?"

"He was downtown."

"Did you hear him when he came in?"

"No, sir."

"Did you?" asked Silas, turning so sharply upon the domestic, who stood regarding the scene, that the poor girl nearly went into a fit.

"Yes, sir; I heard him," faltered the girl, as soon as she could recover spirit enough to reply.

"What time was it, do you know?"

"It was nearly eleven."

"How do you know?"

The detective had been getting more and more uneasy as Silas continued his questions, and he now interposed.

"All in good time, Mr. Coon," he said. "My good girl, will you retire into the passage?"

The girl went willingly enough.

"Do you usually go to bed as early as half-past nine?" asked Slump, turning his attention again to the lady.

"Not always; but I was sleepy."

"You were sleepy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear any one enter your room?"

"I have told you that I heard no one."

"When did you first realize that you had been hurt?"

"Not until I awoke, and found Mrs. Sanders with me."

"Of course, she didn't," interposed Mrs. Sanders, who had been watching the detective with contemptuous impatience. "How could she know that she had been hurt when she was drugged?"

"How do you know that she was drugged?"

"My husband, Dr. Sanders, says so."

"Oh, you and Mrs. Coon are friends?" with a wink, highly appreciated by Silas.

"Yes, we are. Have you got anything to say about that?" exclaimed the little woman, who was fast losing her temper. "If I were Mrs. Coon I would order you to leave the house," she supplemented, as she caught a sneer upon the red-haired man's face.

"This is it," cried Silas, "as if she was drugged! a pretty idea! I don't believe it!"

"I don't care whether you believe it or not, Mr. Silas Coon," cried the woman. "Dr. Sanders' words will be taken by anybody who knows him, and he isn't hoping to make anything by saying it."

"Woman!" exclaimed Silas, growing violent.

But the detective pulled his sleeve.

"These are her friends," Silas went on. "She has another good friend just out of prison."

The color arose to Mrs. Coon's face at this taunt, but she did not speak.

"It's a conspiracy, that's what it is!" cried Silas, as he saw Mrs. Coon leaving the room. "But I shall find out who killed my poor father, and they'll suffer for it," he ended, turning to Slump, when the two were alone.

"We'd better look about," said Slump, "and find out how the murderer got in."

"It's getting too late now," replied Silas, suddenly recollecting the lateness of the hour. "It'll soon be daylight."

Soon afterward he left the house, with the detective in his train, leaving the policeman to watch the body.

The murder of Washington Coon occurred on the night of June 6, which was Friday of the week.

On the Monday morning following a conversation took place in the smoking car of the fast express, which leaves Chicago for Detroit at seven-thirty.

Two men, a negro and a Hebrew, who belonged in the latter city, but had been to the metropolis of the West on business or pleasure, no matter which, were seated comfortably side by side talking over the events of the day.

In the seat behind them was a well dressed, gentlemanly looking man, who had just entered the car for the purpose of enjoying a cigar.

This individual had sharp gray eyes, a smooth face, well developed muscles, and a determined look.

Nick Carter had been to Chicago on business, and was going back by way of Detroit.

He was smoking his cigar, and thinking of nothing in particular, when some words, spoken by the Jew, attracted his attention.

"Pierce Adair was an able lawyer," he remarked, "and it was always a wonder to me that he shouldn't have saved money."

"He could spend money," responded the negro.

"True, he could. The daughter married old Coon on spec, and now the bad luck has come for her."

"Do you really believe she killed him?"

"It's a question."

"Would it be possible for a woman to strike such a blow?"

"She's a strong woman," the Jew answered. "I've seen her often—but you remember George Packer?"

"Oh, yes."

"He was her lover."

"Before she was married?"

"Yes. He's out of prison."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; I met him on Clark Street last Wednesday."

"Did you, though," cried the colored man; "how was he looking?"

"Fine as silk. He'll be suspected of killing Coon," whispered the Jew.

"He's already suspected," answered the darky. "He'll be arrested after the inquest this morning. If there is any case against him and Mrs. Coon, Silas will drive it on; for the property was all willed to the woman."

"Mebbe he did the killin'," whispered his companion.

"I don't believe it."

"You can't tell."

After an interval of silence the colored man broke out again:

"It is suspected that Packer had an accomplice," he said.

"No!" in a tone of surprise. "Where did you learn that?"

"I was talking with a man who had it from the police. They're looking for him on the quiet. You see, a letter from Packer was found by Jim Slump. It never came through the mail, and so some one must have carried it."

The Jew nodded, his countenance expressing interest reawakened.

"The police spotted a queer acting chap on Grand River Avenue the day before Coon was killed."

"And it's thought he brought a letter from George Packer?"

"Yes."

"What did Packer want?"

"Money. But the letter talks of a plan he is to work."

"And he asks for the money to carry it out?"

"Yes."

"That has a bad look for Mrs. Coon," said the Hebrew, after a pause.

"She claims that the letter is a forgery," answered the negro; "and mebbe it is."

The pair went on talking about the startling and mysterious murder; but the detective listened no longer.

The train, on which he was a passenger, arrived at Detroit in due time.

The detective left the car, and as he passed through the gate, he found himself again behind the two men, whose talk had interested him earlier in the day.

He was hastening on to take a car for uptown, when a man walked up and detained him.

"Hold on, will you!" exclaimed an authoritative voice, and looking around the detective saw a stocky-built man, with red hair, and a flattened nose, who had seized his arm. It was the redoubtable Slump.

"You'd best not make any trouble now," he said; "but come along with me."

Suiting his actions to the words, he began dragging Nick Carter toward a closed carriage which stood at the curb, the throng of curiosity seekers, that had quickly gathered, crowding after.

But the detective did not go far.

He jerked his arm free, and turned so fiercely upon Slump that that worthy started back.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Nick, "and what do you want with me?"

"This man is wanted for the killing of Mr. Coon," cried Slump to the crowd, while he watched the detective from the corners of his eyes. "Take hold of him, somebody."

There was a movement in the crowd, and encouraged by Nick Carter's unfeigned surprise, Slump again seized his wrist.

"You miserable rascal!" exclaimed the detective, as he saw the bracelets in Slump's hands, which he had fastened upon so many, but never felt himself.

Then he jerked his hand free, and before Slump could could shift out of reach, he dealt him a right-handed blow, which laid the Detroit detective sprawling upon the walk.

Had he really been the criminal wanted, Nick Carter could easily have effected his escape during the confusion that followed; but instead, he stepped up to the depot policeman and gave himself up.

This functionary was as courteous as Slump had been violent; but, nevertheless, Nick was compelled to attend Slump in the cab to the police station.

His declaration of his real identity, as it could not be immediately proven, remained in doubt, and Slump, who wished to produce so important a personage as the accomplice of the supposed murderer, hurried him away to the place where the inquest was taking place.

During the drive, Slump tried to entangle Nick Carter in some admissions, and though he was not in the least successful, he aroused the detective's anger.

"You're a pitiful rascal!" he exclaimed at last, "and if there is any chance that these people are innocent, I'll get them out of the scrape, if it's only to block your game."

"I only want to see justice done," replied Slump.

"I doubt that," answered Nick, looking at him sharply.

Further talk was cut off by the stopping of the cab.

The inquest brought out little of importance that was not already known.

The action of Slump and Silas Coon at the time served to heighten Nick Carter's determination to sift the affair and when he was released from durance, he did not fail to express himself freely to the reporters.

He believed Mrs. Coon to be innocent, and said so. He was of the opinion that Silas Coon was a plotter and Slump a rascal, and made no secret of his opinions.

Of course, this went into the papers, and made a great deal of noise.

It was probably the cause of a visit he received at the hotel where he was stopping, toward evening.

An individual came up to him while he was sitting in the reading-room, asked if he was the detective called Nick Carter, and, being answered in the affirmative, requested a word with him in private.

The detective looked the man over closely.

He appeared a subject rather for compassion than suspicion, and as he seemed to have something of more consequence in his mind than begging, the detective led the way into a sitting-room, which happened to be without occupants.

Once alone and the door closed, the young man looked around carefully, his eyes resting for a moment upon the open windows.

Then he turned upon the detective with the remark:

"You may think it strange that I, being a stranger should give you so much trouble; but I ventured to do so after reading the kind remarks you made regarding Mrs. Coon, the lady who was charged with murdering her husband."

Nick Carter kept his eyes fixed upon the man's face, but offered no remark.

"She is innocent!" the man went on, with an appearance of much passion. "She is all that is honorable and pure, and in expressing your opinion of her innocence you did a noble action."

"Well," said Nick, "what have you got to do with it?"

"My name is Packer," answered the visitor.

"Mrs. Coon's old lover and the suspected murderer of her husband?" said Nick, watching him closely.

Packer gave a gesture of impatience.

"I am an ex-convict," he answered, bitterly. "Convicted for defending my own life. But that I have the least knowledge of the crime lately committed is an infamous lie."

Nick Carter sat down, and for a moment there was silence.

The ex-convict was scanning the detective's face, as though trying to see whether or not he contemplated giving him up to the police, but Nick's expression was inscrutable.

CHAPTER II.

SLUMP GETS THE WORST OF IT ONCE AGAIN.

After quite a long interval George Packer raised his head, and as he detected Nick Carter watching him, a sad smile flitted across his melancholy countenance.

"Well, sir," he said, hesitatingly, "and what do you think of me?"

The detective shook his head, as though he had not quite made up his mind.

"You must have had some purpose in hunting me out to-night."

"Certainly. Knowing of you by reputation, I thought you might be willing to assist in unveiling this damnable plot."

Nick Carter shrugged his shoulders, and looked a question.

"It is a plot," Packer reiterated, fiercely. "Silas Coon may not have plotted against his father's life, but he has taken the opportunity to implicate his father's widow in the crime."

"What is his motive?" asked Nick.

"Silas Coon is a cold, cowardly, miserly scoundrel," said Packer. "Besides, Mrs. Coon stands between him and a large property, which he would inherit if he could make out his case."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Nick.

"It is willed to Mrs. Coon conditionally with her not, for one year after the testator's decease, being proven guilty of any offense against the laws."

The detective was not easily surprised, but George Packer's declaration appeared so unaccountable that he was really astonished.

"And you mean to say that such a condition is named in the will?"

"I do."

"How did you find it out?" asked Nick, looking sharply at the young man.

"Mrs. Coon herself told me."

"When?"

"Not more than an hour ago."

"Where did you see her?"

"At Dr. Sanders'. He is a friend, living across the street from her late residence, and she has taken refuge with him."

"What motive is the old man supposed to have had for inserting so strange a clause?"

"If any, it came from Silas. It has that appearance."

The detective could not but admit that this was so.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked, after a moment.

"I don't know," George answered, gloomily; "the police are on the lookout for me."

"Why don't you give yourself up?"

"What good would that do? I would only lie in jail. No," he exclaimed, with sudden energy; "I am innocent, and will defend myself to the last. Whatever comes of it, be it upon their own heads."

"Where were you when the pawnbroker was killed?" asked the detective, after a pause.

"On my way here from Chicago."

"You were not in Detroit at the time?"

"No."

"Can't you produce an alibi?"

George shook his head.

"I fear not," he said. "Immediately after my release I went to Chicago. I had a friend there—a shiftless, ignorant fellow, but kind hearted and true. He had been in prison with me, but had been pardoned out a short time before myself. He was the only person who knew of my being in the city upon that particular day—and he, in fact, only knew it because he had left me there."

"This was the man who delivered your letter to Mrs. Coon?"

"Yes."

"Why did you communicate with her?"

"When I was sentenced, I sent a diamond ring of value to her for safe keeping, as it was the only thing I had to keep myself with; I wanted to recover it."

"Well," the detective remarked, "I am inclined to do what I can for the lady. I really think she is innocent. I have no good opinion of Silas Coon from what I have seen of him, and that fellow Slump is certainly a contemptible rascal."

George Packer thanked the detective, and left the hotel.

He made his way swiftly onward, choosing the less-frequented streets, until he reached Atwater Street, down which he turned, to soon plunge into a hallway and disappear.

He stopped before a door, and inserted a key in the lock; but finding another key upon the inside rapped softly.

After a moment the door was unlocked and cautiously opened.

"All right, Bill," whispered Packer, pushing into the dark room.

The man who had admitted Packer was tall, slim and haggard; he was in his shirtsleeves, and his face was covered with a light-colored beard of a week's growth.

He looked closely at Packer, and asked, with some appearance of emotion, what had occurred.

Packer related the facts as they have been given.

Bill Jenkins, for such was his friend's name, listened intently.

"I have made a friend of Nick Carter," concluded Packer. "But now, did you discover anything?"

Bill started and rubbed his chin.

"I went out to the saloon; the woman seems to be prospering."

"Yes," cried Packer, impatiently. "Did you have a chance to talk with the woman?"

"No, I did not see her."

Packer's disappointment appeared in his face.

"She did not appear in the saloon," said Bill, hastily.

"Who tends the bar?"

"A young man."

"Did you see Dan?"

"Yes; he is a ferocious idiot. I asked him to drink, and swallowed so much beer in attempting to open his mouth that I was drunk when I left the place. We can't get him to speak in that way. He's proof against liquor."

"What did he say?"

"Little or nothing."

Packer sat for a while thinking, with his head bent upon his hand.

His companion suddenly interrupted the gloomy train of thought with which he was occupied.

"Why don't you go there?" he asked.

"You told me to ask about board, you know," he continued, as Packer looked at him questioningly. "They keep boarders."

The young man appeared to be considering this proposal; but at last he made up his mind.

"I'll venture it," he said. "I am liable to be recognized by Jen or Silas Coon, but there is nothing else to do."

"You can see Nick Carter," he continued, "and tell him everything. You will not be suspected if you conduct yourself properly."

"Shall I tell him where you are?"

"Yes; we must trust him, because we can do nothing without his aid."

Packer, after making a few alterations in his dress, stood before his friend ready to depart.

"I shall go there at once," he said. "To-morrow night you see Nick Carter, and the next morning at ten I will come here."

Jenkins nodded his assent; the two men shook hands, and a moment later the fugitive was gliding down the stairs.

He reached Cherry Street by a circuitous route, and then caught a Grand River Avenue car.

Far out on Grand River Avenue, near the limit of the car line, was a new brick building.

The lower part of the building was used as a saloon, and a swinging tin sign at the corner announced that board could be had "by the day or week."

The name of the proprietor of the place was Mrs. Wolf, and a wolf, big as life, and painted red, could be seen by day, perched upon the top of the building.

Mrs. Wolf was said to be careless as to the character of her boarders; dances took place in one of the wings of the building that frequently gave occasion for police interference; persons had been beaten out of their money in a little gambling-room upstairs—altogether the place was considered a tough joint by all who knew it.

Mrs. Wolf, however, always had plenty of money to keep out of difficulty, or to get out after falling into it, and upon the evening George Packer started for the Red Wolf, the light in the saloon was bright and everything about was serene.

He jumped from the street car before the door, and walked briskly into the saloon.

It was now about nine o'clock in the evening, and there were but few persons in the place.

Stretched out upon a bench near the window, at the end of the bar, was a man of large bone and great muscular development.

He had a mass of yellow hair, which fell over his low forehead, there was an ugly scar upon his cheek, apparently the effects of a bite, and the lobe of one ear was missing.

The eyes of this brutal looking individual were closed, and he snored heavily.

The other persons were a sharp featured young man in his shirtsleeves, with a white apron wound about his waist, and three other men who were playing cards while he looked on.

Packer entered, pausing near the door to look around.

"Hello!" drawled the bartender, with a grin. "Somethin' wanted?"

George advanced at this.

"I want board if the rates are reasonable."

"Cert," replied the barkeeper, who forthwith rang the bell which was hung over a desk at the far end of the bar.

It was immediately answered by the opening of a door at the rear, and a very fat woman waddled in.

This was the proprietress of the Red Wolf.

Her hair was light, like her son's, the individual asleep upon the bench, and she had a very red nose, with small, quick eyes.

Packer, who gave his name as Rundell, soon settled the preliminaries, and paid down in advance for a week's board.

Mrs. Wolf disappeared immediately afterward, and the barkeeper invited Rundell, as we may now call him, to have a drink.

As he raised the glass to his lips he chanced to glance over the bar, and saw that Dan Wolf had opened his eyes, and was watching him with a peculiar stare.

There was so much meaning in the big man's small eyes, that Packer started and nearly dropped the glass from his hand.

Wolf yawned, swore an oath, and swaggered up to the bar.

"I'll take a drink, Billy," he remarked, grinning at Packer, with a mixture of sheepishness and ferocity.

After bestowing two winks upon Packer, one before he drank, and another afterward, Dan wiped his mouth, and sat down heavily in a chair, swearing that it was blanked dull.

George lighted a cigar, and sat smoking and watching the card players.

Wolf did not address him again, but as often as George looked in his direction he found the ruffian watching him.

The last thing he saw as he left the barroom, at the heels of a boy who had been called to show him to his room, was Dan's dull eyes watching him.

He followed his guide through so many passages that he was completely bewildered, and was finally shown into a room which seemed to be at the extreme end of the building.

"Here ye air," announced the boy, as he placed the lamp upon the stand.

When he was alone, Packer carefully fastened the door, and then threw off his clothes, and was soon in bed.

He fell asleep at last; but awoke with a start, and at once his faculty of hearing became strained to catch the sound that seemed to come from behind his bedstead.

The room was in total darkness.

Packer lay perfectly quiet, and after a moment became

satisfied that some person was near him, but whether the interloper was in the room or not he was unable to decide.

After a moment there was a faint click, and the soft tread of some one in felt shoes moved toward his bed.

Packer had placed a revolver within reach of his hand before going to bed, and at the first alarm he seized the weapon and held it in readiness.

The prowler appeared to be listening to learn if his entrance had been noticed, and deciding at last that Packer still slept, he drew the slide of a dark lantern, and for several minutes scrutinized the face of the occupant of the bed.

The interloper was Dan Wolf.

He was now engaged in examining our adventurer's clothing.

A dark opening in the wall at the bed's head told of the manner in which Wolf had gained admission, and as he had little money and no papers, Packer was satisfied to allow him to prosecute his search without disturbance.

The ruffian continued quietly examining every fold in the clothing of the new boarder, and every other place that could conceal a paper.

At last he appeared satisfied, and putting everything back as he found it, turned again toward the bed.

George had to undergo another moment of disturbing scrutiny, then Wolf moved back, the light was shut off, and the secret door closed with a click.

Packer jumped out of bed, and after listening for a moment at the door, through which the ruffian had passed, began to don his clothes rapidly.

He was resolved to make an attempt to learn the motive of the midnight visit, and did not hesitate at the thought of the peril it might lead him into.

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER AT WORK.

George Packer's friend, Bill Jenkins, had managed to communicate with Nick Carter according to promise, and he had explained all that Packer had wanted him to state.

Only one point of the conference is necessary at present.

Silas Coon lived over his store, boarding with the family of his clerk.

The only other boarder was a woman called Barbara Trenton.

She was the daughter of Mrs. Wolf, the keeper of the Grand River Avenue roadhouse, and was a widow.

Jenkins also told the detective that there were rumors that Coon intended to marry a young woman named Emily Spottesville, and that this would probably make trouble for him with Mrs. Trenton.

Nick determined to visit Mrs. Trenton, and the morning following the events narrated in the last chapter found him ringing the bell of the apartment over Silas Coon's store.

A submissive looking woman answered the ring.

"Is Mrs. Trenton at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to see her."

He was admitted to what appeared the family dining-room.

In a few minutes the woman returned, and announced that Mrs. Trenton would see him.

It should be stated that Nick Carter had delivered to the woman a gilt edged card upon which "John H. Spottesville" had been written by himself.

He was conducted into a room expensively furnished, but with little taste, where he was received by Mrs. Trenton.

She was a large, handsomely-formed woman, with light hair and a faded complexion.

At the present moment she was in a state of suppressed rage, and the fact was so clearly expressed in her countenance as she glanced at Nick Carter, that he half expected it would fall upon him.

She seemed to put constraint upon herself, however, and he was invited to be seated.

"You see, from my card, ma'am," said the detective, with a glance at some small fragments of paper near where she was seated, which were all that the lady's hatred of the name Spottesville had allowed to remain, "that my name is Spottesville."

Mrs. Trenton nodded, but did not speak.

"My niece, Miss Emily Spottesville, is young, and little acquainted with the world" (Mrs. Trenton tossed her head very contemptuously at this), "and I am her natural protector."

"But how am I interested in all this?" exclaimed the lady. "I am not acquainted with Emily Spottesville, and——"

She stopped, finding that the visitor was watching her gravely, and burst into a laugh, telling of suppressed rage.

"I have learned since my arrival in the city that Mr. Coon visits at the house of my relatives," the detective continued, in a smooth matter-of-fact way that must disarm suspicion in a listener.

"I wanted to find out something of his character; whether he was a proper person to visit in a respectable family. I considered that the easiest way to satisfy my doubts would be to inquire at his boarding place."

"Well, sir," she replied, trying to assume a disinterested manner, but there was a spiteful accent underneath, "if Mr. Coon is paying attentions to the girl, intending to marry her, he is a wretch, for to my certain knowledge he is already engaged to marry another."

The lady's voice raised sharp and shrill at the end of her speech.

"You astonish me!" cried the visitor, lifting up his hands in amaze. "What turpitude!"

Barbara Trenton laughed savagely.

"Excuse me," she said; "but are you a preacher?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the detective, with great promptitude, and without the alteration of a muscle. "I have the honor to be an unworthy member of the Baptist Communion."

"Well, then, I advise you to have your niece drop Silas Coon, or something will happen."

"Bless me!" cried the visitor.

He dropped his eyes, and for a moment looked so solemn that, enraged as she was, the woman could scarcely contain her laughter.

"Dear me," he began, twisting his hat and appearing greatly embarrassed. "I fear I have been committing

a rudeness. There appears to be a closer acquaintance between Mr. Coon and yourself than I apprehended."

"Yes, sir; we are engaged to be married."

"Ah, indeed, if I had only known——"

At that juncture the detective heard a man's voice speaking in the dining-room.

Barbara Trenton also heard the sound.

She started, and her eyes snapped.

The speaker was Silas Coon.

"Coon," thought Nick Carter, with an inward chuckle, "prepare for battle—you're in for it now."

Mrs. Trenton came toward him, saying, in a low tone:

"I don't want him to know that I've been told of his treachery. If you want to learn anything further about him, ask any one who knows him."

She opened the door, and the detective could but follow.

They passed out into the dining-room where the pawnbroker still was, and Barbara could not avoid introducing the stranger.

"Mr. John Silver," she said, "a Baptist minister."

Coon, who knew the climate, saw that there was something wrong with his ladylove, and apprehended a cloudburst, if not a full grown cyclone, was ready to sweep down upon him.

His only safety lay in detaining the preacher, whom, as she had declared him to be an old friend of her former husband's, she might regard with some respect and spare him in the visitor's presence.

So he shook the detective by the hand with profuse cordiality, carefully avoiding to meet the gaze of Barbara.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir," he declared, his one eye bent upon the ground, while the misfit glass one stared the detective in the face. "I hope you will stay to supper; Mrs. Trenton has already invited you, I presume; but, if she has neglected to do so, I hope you will become my guest. I'm not very religious myself, but I always like to honor the church."

The detective coughed, and choosing not to see the warning shakes of the lady's head, he thanked the pawnbroker for his hospitality, and agreed to sup with all imaginable readiness.

Meanwhile, it is time to return to the Red Wolf, where the fugitive was about to investigate the mysteries of the secret passage.

It required some moments for Packer to find the spring controlling the secret door, but at last his knife blade touched it, and it opened easily.

A dark and narrow passage, so low that a man could not walk upright in it, had been built in between the two buildings.

Dan Wolf had already left the passage.

It extended about sixty feet, and ended at a blank wall.

In the dust upon the floor Packer had been able to trace Wolf's footsteps.

The footprints ended, however, at the end of the passage.

He had little doubt but that there was another concealed oor here, but was unable to detect its secret.

After a time, he returned to his room, and retired; but it as long before he could get to sleep.

In the morning, after getting his breakfast, he walked out.

He had not seen Wolf, and did not return until toward evening.

He met his friend and ally at the place appointed, and the latter was able to satisfy the fugitive that Nick Carter was going to work upon the case.

When he again reached the Red Wolf, Packer was in a more cheerful frame of mind.

The supper tables were crowded, and all was bustle and activity.

Packer hurried through his supper, and went up to his room.

He feared to mingle with the crowd, as he might be recognized at any moment, and after half an hour he left the hotel by a rear door, and walked toward town.

He was still only twenty minutes' brisk walk from the Red Wolf, when he met a carriage, occupied by two persons, driving rapidly toward the place.

The occupants of the vehicle were Silas Coon and Nick Carter.

Packer gave a great start as he saw the latter in the company of his fiercest enemy, and he gazed long after the carriage.

"Silas Coon," he muttered, "and Nick Carter! and they seemed the best of friends. What does it mean?"

It did not occur to him that it might be part of the detective's plan to become acquainted with the pawnbroker; but Nick Carter was not disguised.

The young man walked on madly, feeling that he had lost the friend upon whom he had the most dependence.

At last he concluded desperately to return to the Red Wolf.

"If Nick Carter has turned against me," he muttered, "there is no use fighting. He knows where I am to be found."

He retraced his steps to the Red Wolf much swifter than he had come.

The saloon was now crowded, and the whole house brilliantly lighted.

He was now anxious to find the detective.

He went through several rooms in search of him.

At last he came upon him in a sitting-room opening from the room where they were dancing.

Nick Carter sat in a corner with his hat on, while in front of him was a dashing looking female, who was talking to him with great animation.

Packer paused near the door, to glance at the couple.

There was a look of mingled surprise, uneasiness and satisfaction upon the detective's face, which the young man did not understand.

As he caught sight of Packer, Nick gave a slight signal with his lips.

Packer sat down near the door, and waited, watching the detective and his fair companion with puzzled alarm.

Nick Carter seemed embarrassed by her attentions, and desirous of getting away.

Slowly the idea came into Packer's mind that Nick Carter was playing some deep game, and that Silas Coon, as well as the woman, were being imposed upon.

This gave the young man a little relief from his anxiety, and he sat impatiently waiting for an opportunity to speak with Nick Carter until a burly fellow, his face inflamed by drink, swaggered up to the woman.

He appeared to ask her to dance, there was some talk,

accompanied by gestures, and then, after she had whispered for a moment into the detective's ear, the burly man carried her away.

Nick Carter yawned, looked sheepishly at the other person in the room, and walked out slowly.

There was an audible laugh as he disappeared.

"Who is he?" asked two or three voices.

"He's a Baptist preacher," announced a man who sat in the open window.

There was a laugh at this.

"Fact," the fellow continued. "He came down with Si Coon. I heard him say he never took a drink in his life. Kit'll wake the fossil up."

Packer waited to hear no more, but hurried after the subject of their jeers.

Nick Carter evidently expected him.

He came out of a cloakroom, and passed the astonished Packer.

"I'm going to the stable," he whispered, as he brushed past. "Be careful!"

Packer paused to watch the stablemen, who were putting in a team.

As he stood there, the detective walked past, and disappeared around the corner of the stable.

In a moment George followed him.

"You must place some control over yourself, or you will ruin my plans," were the detective's first words.

"I am anxious. What brought you here?"

"I came with Coon. I cannot tell you how I made his acquaintance, it would take too long. But I think he will regret the intimacy. You will take no further notice of me while I am here, under any circumstances."

"Yes," said Packer, much abashed; "but do you know the character of the people? If you were discovered to be a detective, you would not be allowed to escape with life."

Nick Carter only chuckled at his warning, and, repeating his caution, slipped away in the darkness.

Packer was resolved to obey the detective's instructions.

After loitering about the stable for a time, he went back to the house.

As he approached, he saw two men standing upon a porch at the side of the house.

A light shone through the open door at their back, and he saw that one of the pair was Dan Wolf.

His companion bore a strong resemblance to Jim Slump.

The two men were in close consultation, and had not seen the fugitive, who began to move softly toward them.

He reached the side of the porch without being discovered, and saw that the smaller of the men was really Slump.

"I hadn't a chance to speak to Coon," Slump was saying. "Can you imagine what business he has with him?"

Packer saw an expression of fear convulse the face of Dan Wolf, but it passed at once.

"No, I can't," he replied, in his usual dogged fashion.

"He'd better be told?"

"Coon?"

"Yes."

The two were silent for a moment, then Slump said:

"Is the chap you suspect around where I can get a look at him?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he'd gone to bed."

"Can you find out?"

"Sure. Wait a minute."

Dan turned into the house.

Packer's consternation may be imagined.

He knew that the last words referred to himself.

Wolf soon came back.

"Yes," he said; "his key is gone. Here's one'll unlock the door. Open the door, and take him. You've got a warrant?"

Slump hesitated.

"Will you help?" he asked.

"No."

"Then I'll wait until he shows up."

Dan made no reply, and a moment later the two went into the house.

Packer had taken the key to his room from the key board, and it had not been since returned.

This accounts for Dan's mistake.

The poor fellow's fright was excessive.

Not only was Slump at his heels, but the detective's promising plans would be defeated.

He could not determine whether it was best to warn Nick Carter against his absolute command, or seek his own safety in immediate flight.

The stirring events of this night were as follows:

George Packer, on going to warn Nick Carter, encountered Slump in one of the rooms, and after a short struggle bound and gagged him, leaving him lying on the floor.

He then continued his search, and discovered that Nick Carter, in his pretense of being a Baptist preacher, had joined Silas Coon and others in a game of poker. Before he could warn him, a quarrel broke out, and the police made a raid on the place. Fearful of being himself captured, Packer made his escape on horseback; but, being shot in the leg by a posse of pursuing policemen, he slipped off his horse, and managed to limp into a private residence on the road.

Meanwhile, Silas Coon had been secretly notified by Dan Wolf, that the pretended preacher was really the famous detective, and Silas then thought it best to leave the house. For some reason, Nick Carter chose to remain, and then a desperate resolve entered the head of Dan Wolf. He showed the detective into the same room in which Slump was lying bound. The room was pitch-dark, and he did not discover the latter's presence. Nick, however, did, and after learning how he came there, left him lying on the floor and coolly went to bed.

So quiet were the detective's nerves, that he was almost instantly asleep.

It was early morning, when sleep is soundest and all about the house was quiet.

This was not the case with the unlucky prisoner.

He lay there, groaning in spirit, and in such mortal fear of Nick Carter that he scarcely dared to move his head, for fear of arousing him into some violence.

But to Slump's overstrained senses something seemed to be moving stealthily just at his head, and he thought he could hear their cautious breathing.

With a shiver, dreading he knew not what, the poor rascal lay listening for some decisive sounds that could tell him of the nature of the thing whose sinister movements struck him into a cold sweat.

Meanwhile, George Packer crept cautiously along the

half of the house he had entered. Suddenly one of the doors was opened.

A lady, dressed in a morning wrapper, came out.

As the door opened, the fugitive had fallen back a step, and he instinctively drawn a revolver.

As she saw this apparition—his face flecked with spots of mud, his eyes staring and bloodshot, his gestures full of horror—the lady uttered a slight cry.

But this was broken in the utterance, for she recognized the ex-convict, and turning deathly pale, she would have fallen had not George caught her in his arms.

He had unwittingly taken refuge in the residence of Dr. Sanders, and the lady was Kate, the pawnbroker's widow.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PAWNBROKER'S CLERK.

The unlucky Slump was between two horns of a dilemma.

He feared to awake the detective.

He was badly frightened by the mysterious noise.

While thinking whether he had better cry out, and risk the consequences of waking Nick Carter on a false alarm, or remain to be satisfied that there was real danger, he heard a metallic click, and something struck his elbow sharply.

The poor devil started into a sitting posture, and uttered a gurgling cry.

The next instant he was seized by the throat in a grip that shut off what little sounds his fright would have suffered him to utter.

Not knowing whether he was in the grasp of a demon or a man, shackled hand and foot, Slump was not in a situation to fight for his life.

His struggles were sufficient, however, to arouse Nick Carter.

He was bound awake in an instant, and concluded that his prisoner was attempting to escape.

"Hold!" he exclaimed, leaping out at the end of the bed, "or you're a dead man!"

Slump felt himself jerked backward by a powerful hand, and when Nick Carter flashed the light of the dark-lantern toward the spot where he had lain, he saw that his place was empty.

There was a dragging sound behind the wall.

Nick Carter ran across the room, and listened, but the sounds, slight at first, had now ceased altogether.

He could not decide upon their nature; but it was certain that Slump was gone, and the quilt upon which he had rested was tangled into a knot in the struggle that had taken place.

Nick Carter was not easily surprised, but he could not account for Slump's disappearance.

He tried the door.

It was fastened, and the key which he had taken to bed with him had not been used.

He made a thorough search, but failed to discover the secret door.

"That's one on me," he said, half aloud, as he finished dressing. "It's the strangest thing I ever heard of. There seemed to be a struggle going on."

He looked at his watch.

It was half-past five, and he decided to go downstairs.

He went out, locking the door.

It was dark in the passage, and he turned to the right instead of the left, going away from the stairs, which he had mounted to reach the room.

A few steps carried him to a window overlooking the stable yard, and then he saw his mistake.

He was turning to retrace his steps, when he noticed a narrow flight of stairs leading above.

They started from a very small room, or closet, the door of which was partly open.

Nick Carter pushed the door farther open, and looked in.

There was a small window, covered deep in cobwebs, giving light to the flight of steps which led up to a trapdoor.

The steps were covered with dust, but there were prints upon them, showing that some person had recently passed.

Nick Carter, having satisfied his curiosity as far as seemed practicable, was upon the point of retreating, when the rattling sound of iron fell upon his ear.

It seemed directly overhead.

The sound was one familiar to the detective: it might have been made by dropping a pair of handcuffs upon the floor, and he at once connected the mysteriously vanished Slump with the noise.

The detective turned, and began to creep cautiously up the steps, taking care that they should not give out the slightest creak beneath his tread.

He soon had his ear against the trapdoor.

Slump was there, sure enough, and Nick heard him say, distinctly:

"You choked the life nearly out of me, and now you are damning me for being there. Do you suppose I wanted to fall in your way?"

"I would have done for him, if you hadn't been there," answered another deep voice. "D—n 'im!"

"Ditto, with all my heart!" cried Slump. "But you may consider yourself lucky that you got off."

The other uttered a sullen growl of contempt and baffled rage.

"Oh, he's a cunning rascal!" said Slump. "He had his gun ready, and don't you think he wouldn't use it."

"I ain't afraid of his gun."

"Then why don't you go down after him?"

There was no answer.

The listener heard a man tread heavily across the floor, and throw himself into a seat.

Nick Carter knew that the conversation referred to himself.

Evidently the unknown had intended to assassinate him; but in some manner, unknown to the detective, had become entangled with Slump.

He was anxious to learn the identity of the ruffian.

It could not be Silas Coon, although he was inclined to think the pawnbroker was aware of the trick he had played upon him.

It occurred to him that Dan Wolf, of whom George Packer's ally had given a bad account, was the person; but what motive could he have for putting him out of the way?

Nick remained in his position, hoping to discover the motive.

Slump appeared to be washing himself, and getting into a more presentable shape.

"I've had a fine time of it," he complained. "Try to make an arrest and get knocked cold. Then to have the fellow I have a warrant for put the nippers on me; fasten my mouth open, and leave me gaping in the dark for two or three hours, only in the end to fall into the hands of that cursed spider. And to cap it all, you clap your clutches on me, and choke my eyes nearly out of my head. That's what you may call hard luck. What account will I give of myself to the people I brought down here last night, I'd like to know? I'm in a nice mess."

He ended with a cross between a curse and a howl, that seemed so diverting to his companion that he forgot his own disappointment, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"You look as though you'd been partly hung, and cut down by mistake 'fore ye was stiff," he said. "Haw! haw! he! I'm d—d if I don't think that's how you'll end up."

"I'll wait for you, Dan Wolf," cried Slump, nettled by the other's jeers. "You're a good deal nearer swinging than I am."

Wolf gave a nervous laugh, and ordered Slump to hurry up his preparations.

"I want to go down and get a drink," he said. "I didn't go to bed last night."

As he expected the two rascals would come down the stairs where he crouched, the detective thought it policy to leave.

The conversation he had overheard was important in many ways.

It was plain that Dan Wolf had intended to kill him while he slept, and had entered his room for that purpose.

The ruffian's motive was not yet clear; but it was evident that he had been informed by Slump of his identity.

Nick Carter recollected Silas Coon's whispers with the ruffian previous to his proposition that they remain in the house until morning, and it seemed possible that Silas was conscious of Wolf's murderous intent.

It should be stated that the detective had failed to learn anything from Mrs. Trenton regarding Coon.

She had not appeared at the supper table, and the landlady had reported a sudden headache as the cause.

Coon had made no comment; but had invited his new friend to accompany him out to the Red Wolf.

That there was concerted action between the trio of scoundrels, Coon, Wolf and Slump, the detective felt certain.

The motive which had drawn them together still remained dark.

All three, however, were equally anxious to secure George Packer, and that so much expense would be natural to Silas for the mere purpose of prosecuting the supposed slayer of his father, Nick Carter did not believe.

Besides, they had no reason for hating him, except as he was interposing in the ex-convict's behalf.

The detective found the saloon door open when he reached the lower part of the house.

"How's the man that was shot last night?" he asked the bartender, as he was lighting a cigar.

"Stiff."

"Did they catch his slayer?"

"Oh, yes, they got him before he left the house."

"I thought they were in pursuit of some one when I went to bed."

"That was another cove. He had no hand in the shooting."

"Who was he?"

"His name is George Packer. Used to be a fly duck about town, but went up for killing Billy McShea. He's wanted now for the murder of Washington Coon, the father of Si."

"Ah! did they capture him?"

"I don't know, really. I'd like to find out. I'll bet he gives them a hard tussle, and shouldn't be surprised if some of the fly-cops are meat for the ducks by this time."

Some persons entered at this juncture, and the detective turned to see Dan Wolf, followed by Slump.

The former did not glance at the detective, but stalked up to the bar.

Nick Carter nodded familiarly to Slump, who only grunted in return.

The fellow had sufficient reason for being out of humor.

His face and neck was badly lacerated and swollen. Where not covered by plasters it was nearly as dark a shade as his hat.

Besides, his clothes were torn, and one eye entirely closed, and covered with bandages.

Nick Carter stood in the doorway watching the men as they gulped down their liquor.

"Well, I'm off," said Slump, when he had "braced up" sufficiently.

He came toward the door.

"What lay are you on now?" asked Nick Carter, in a low tone, as he passed.

Slump turned (his neck being stiff and immovable) to look an inquiry.

"You do put up some wonderful disguises," the detective went on, roguishly. "This is a better one than——"

But Slump was beyond hearing of further taunts, running into the road to catch a passing car for town.

Nick Carter breakfasted at the hotel, and then, as Coon did not put in an appearance, he took the same direction.

He could play the *rôle* of the Baptist preacher no longer upon the pawnbroker, or at the Red Wolf.

* * * * * * *

Silas Coon left the Red Wolf a badly frightened man.

Dan Wolf had sworn to murder Nick Carter, but the pawnbroker did not believe he would accomplish it.

In the meantime, he was under suspicion.

Ruin stared him in the face, and the rascal was very gloomy.

He tried to recollect whether he had dropped any chance words that the detective could fasten upon.

"I knew nothing," he moaned, half aloud. "I never would have consulted—never—never!"

Had Mrs. Trenton said anything?

She had been very angry with him, and had been long closeted with the detective.

Silas wished that he had borne the brunt of the woman's anger instead of hiding behind the pretended preacher.

"D——n him!" cried Silas, heartily, and he drove on, trying to direct his thoughts to other channels.

As he passed the residence of Dr. Sanders he saw a

policeman, who appeared to be on guard at the rear of the house.

Silas slowed up and called to a man who had just come out of the yard.

He had heard that George Packer had not been taken before he left the hotel.

These men were doubtless watching for him.

"Did they take the—the——" he stammered at the word "murderer" and said "convict?"

"No, not yet."

"Where was he last seen?"

"He went into this yard."

Dr. Sanders lives here?"

"Yes."

"Have they searched the house?"

"Yes."

"Found no trace?"

"Not a bit."

Silas drove on.

He wished in his heart that Mrs. Coon would attempt to assist Packer.

"It'll look bad for 'em, anyway," was his cheerful thought. "I'll hint to the police that Sanders is helping Packer."

Silas reached the city and drove direct to the stables where he put up his horse.

It was still early in the morning.

His place of business had not been opened when he reached it.

He unlocked the front door and entered.

In the rear of the office was a small room having a glass door.

A young clerk slept there.

Silas peered in through the tarnished glass.

The clerk was asleep.

Silas could see that his face was flushed, and he breathed hard.

"Seth has been out again," he muttered, savagely. "I'll have to fire that boy."

He took off his hat, sat down at his private desk, and after biting his fingers for a moment unlocked a small drawer with a key that hung on his watch chain.

There were a few papers tied up in orderly fashion.

Silas took them out and searched through them for a moment.

He was growing excited.

His face paled and his one eye rolled.

This emotion was not caused by what he had found in the drawer, but by something that was missing.

He began a hurried, nervous search of his desk.

He got up a dozen times to look about it and under it, then sat down and searched again.

He was still engaged in this manner when the glass door opened.

Seth Albers, the clerk, entered.

"Good-morning," he said.

Silas grunted and regarded him severely; but there was an under-lurking expression of fear in his countenance.

The clerk was a light-haired, good-looking young fellow of twenty or thereabouts.

There were dark circles beneath his eyes, and he looked as though he had, as Silas had said, "been out."

"Hem!" coughed the young man, opening and closing his watchcase with a snap. "Shall I open the office for business? It wants half an hour of the regular time."

"No," answered Silas, gruffly. "Sit down, I want to talk with you."

Seth drew up his chair in a swaggering sort of way.

He was liable to swagger, this young man.

He was a member of a boxing club, was up to all the sport going, and wasn't going to let the boss bluff him—not a bit of it.

"You were not in the store last night?" said Silas.

"Yes, sir, I was."

"From what time?"

"About eleven."

"About?"

"I may have got in earlier, you know," said Seth, pleasantly.

Silas frowned heavily.

"I presume you understand that it is a part of your employment to be in the office from twelve o'clock until daylight—as much so as to be on duty during business hours. But there is something besides neglect of duty. I left certain papers in this drawer"—pointing to the one he had first unlocked—"they are gone."

"Oh!" cried Seth.

Silas was watching him sternly.

"Did you open that drawer?" he cried.

"No, sir."

Seth attempted to swagger, but he did not succeed.

"Do you know who did open it?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anything about the papers?"

Silas raised his voice shrilly.

He saw that the young man did know something, and he was greatly alarmed.

"I found a paper on the floor," said the clerk, a cunning look in his eyes. "Perhaps that is the one."

Seth took out a Russia leather pocketbook, and after a long search, very painful to Silas, among fancy pictures, notes, newspaper clippings, and various other things interesting to a "young sport," extracted a piece of note-paper.

Silas seized it with avidity.

His hand trembled so violently that he could scarcely read, but he saw that it was one of the missing papers.

It read as follows:

"CHICAGO, June 4th.

"I am coming on soon. Want money badly. Bearer can be trusted with money, but say nothing to him that can reflect upon us."

This was followed by several scrawls, half formed words and letters, as though some one had been learning to write, or imitate another's handwriting.

Silas tore this paper up very small, put the pieces in his mouth, chewing them to a pulp.

Seth sat before him with downcast eyes.

He looked uncomfortable and a little scared.

It was two or three moments before Silas could speak, and then his voice was quite hoarse.

"Where did you find this paper?" he began. "In itself it is of no importance—not the least importance to any one; but there were other papers—documents with it, and they are missing."

"I found it in the chair you are sitting in," answered Seth, but without looking up.

"When?"

"Last night."

"After you came in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does Mr. Sharp know of it?"

"No, sir."

"Or any other person?"

"No, sir."

The young man appeared quite certain about this, and it was probably the truth.

The secret was not out yet.

The pawnbroker's one eye flashed upon the young man in a manner that individual would not have liked had he observed it.

"Where are the other papers?" demanded Silas, after an interval.

"I don't know, really. I—I—in fact, Mr. Coon, to be plain, I fear I may have burned them."

"Ah!"

It was wonderful how Silas' face brightened up, and the "ah!" was a long sigh of relief.

"You see," continued Seth, "I was chilly last night, and afraid that I was going to be ill, so I warmed a little brandy and water on the stove——"

"And you burned up those papers?" cried Silas.

"I did kindle the fire with some papers I found scattered about the floor," the youth admitted.

Silas rubbed his hands, leaped from his chair at a bound, and flew across to a stove, which, as it was in a sort of alcove and not in the way, was not taken down in the summer months.

It required but a moment to throw the door open.

Sure enough, there were the ashes of paper.

Silas came slowly back to his seat.

The boy had been watching him, a strange look upon his face, but he appeared only a little anxious when Silas confronted him again.

"Will the loss of these papers be of any great consequence?" he asked, stealing a look in Coon's face.

"No; they can be replaced. But they relate to a business transaction which I don't care to have become public at this time."

"I am glad of that!" cried Seth, in a tone that sounded like mocking that the pawnbroker started and looked up sharply.

"Because," the clerk went on, calmly, "I wanted to ask for a vacation to visit my parents, and an advance of some cash."

"Hum! Your parents live in Toronto?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll see about it."

"But I am quite anxious to start to-night."

"Well, I guess we can spare you."

The rest of the conversation related to the "advance." At the end the clerk obtained his leave of absence, with ten dollars to pay his expenses, and Silas went upstairs to breakfast, with the unpleasant idea that he was in this young man's power, and that the clerk was cunning enough to use his opportunities.

When he was alone, Seth executed a fancy clog upon the office floor; winked with many contortions of the face at his reflection in the window glass, and finally burst into a chuckling laugh.

"Um—um, not any!" he muttered, as he dusted the furniture. "I guess I ain't got a pull! Oh, no, not a bit of it! No, indeed!"

CHAPTER V.

TRACKED BY AN ASSASSIN.

There was the usual crowd of young men in a pool-room on Fort Street in the evening after Seth Albers had his memorable interview with his employer.

Seth was there.

He was in high spirits; had been spending money freely to celebrate the beginning of his vacation, and had drank a goodly number of claret punches.

He was engaged in playing pool with several other young men.

Seth played with considerable dash and spirit.

He had won the pot several times in succession, and some of his antagonists were losing their temper.

This was notably the case of a tall man, considerably older than the others.

It was evident that the stakes were to him an important item, and he began to use a bullying tone.

Among the on-lookers was a smooth-faced, youngish-looking man.

He seemed to be a stranger, and sat quietly smoking his cigar.

As the game went on it became apparent that Seth was going to get into a quarrel.

The more respectable of the players gradually dropped out of the game, as the difficulty of associating with the tall man increased, and their places were taken by a less scrupulous crowd.

Seth played on, however.

He continued to win and to drink claret punches; his disputes with his tall antagonist increased in frequency and became personal in tone.

At last it came to an open rupture.

Loud words passed, the tall man made a rush at Seth, who would undoubtedly have got the worst of it, had not an unexpected ally appeared.

The quiet young man leaped from his chair and interfered.

"Who in the deuce are you?" demanded the bully, fiercely, as the other confronted him. "I'll wipe the floor with you in a minute."

"No, you won't." said the other, quietly taking off his coat. "The other feller is right, and I won't see him done in this way."

There was a general laugh.

The tall man was a scrapper of some local fame.

The crowd expected to see him eat up the dude in short order.

He thought so, too, and the other had barely got his coat off before he struck a left-handed blow, which was neatly parried.

Then, before he could recover himself, his slight-looking antagonist returned a powerful blow upon his chin, following up with his left, which sent the tall man under the table.

He was up in a minute, however, but it was only to be floored before he had well got his feet.

Then the crowd interfered, and the stranger and Seth were hustled out by the owner of the place.

The clerk offered his hand when they reached the walk.

"You're a trump," he said. "That man would have made short work of me. Wish you'd teach me how to get in that sort of blow."

The stranger shook the other's hand.

He seemed pleased with his new acquaintance, and when Seth proposed that they go and take a drink he readily agreed.

That drink led to several more.

The new acquaintances became very friendly.

Seth grew communicative as the hour grew later.

He talked a good deal about a "pull" he had on the "gov'nor."

His companion, who was no other than Nick Carter, and had shadowed the boy in hope of learning something regarding the secrets of his employer, led him on as much as possible.

Together they visited several saloons, Seth declaring after every drink, in a thicker tone, that that should be his last.

He was going out of town that night on a vacation. He wasn't going alone, but there was a fine girl on —— Street, who was going with him.

"Now, I can't take another drink, Charlie"—the detective had said his name was Charlie—said Seth, in a maudlin tone, as he tried to steady his watch between his gaze and the light. "Deuce take it—hic—my watch's stopped."

"No, you're stopped, that's all."

"What's the time?"

"Wants a minute to half-past eleven."

"An' the train leaves at eleven-fifty-five; there's half 'nour to make the—hic—train."

"You can't go to-night."

"I will go," wailed Seth. "What'll Kitty think?"

"She'll think you were detained on business at the office."

"That won't go; I saw 'er this after—hic—noon, an' she'll be all ready."

Seth began to weep.

The detective, who had his own reasons for wishing to detain the young man in the city, hailed a cab which chanced to be passing.

It required but a little to prevail upon Seth to go home.

He was sleepy, waking up only occasionally to wail about Kitty's disappointment.

He wanted to go immediately to make his excuses, but his companion overruled this.

They reached the building where Seth got his meals, and where he had a room, which he occasionally occupied under circumstances like the present.

Nick Carter assisted him to his flat, unlocked his door and entered with him.

The room was well furnished enough, but only one thing is necessary to be described.

It had an alcove, across which a curtain was drawn, and Seth explained that he kept his clothes there.

The bureau, with a large mirror, was opposite the alcove, and as the detective was helping Seth off with his coat, he chanced to talk to Seth as though nothing had happened.

The clerk was talking about his employer again.

"He thinks I ain't making money, you know," he said. "But I'll fool him. I take a little commission once in a while on my own account. That's all right?"

"Sure."

"He's a file, he is; but I took his edge off this mornin'. I said, 'see here, Coon—hic—I want fifty bills and a month's leave;' he shelled out."

"You must have him on the hip."

"You bet."

"Learned some of his secrets, eh?"

Seth winked.

He had thrown himself upon the bed in his clothes, and was very sleepy.

"You go to 106 —— Street, like a good feller, and ask for Kitty Winch," he said. "Tell her I'm sick."

"Yes, I'll go."

"Tell her we'll surely start to-morrow."

"All right."

"I'll go down and pull the old man's leg for some more cash to-morrow. I might as well—hic—have a hundred more."

The detective tried to pump the secret out of the young man, but Seth had not entirely lost his cunning, although he was very drunk.

He would only answer by innuendoes and dark hints; his talk became more confused every moment, and at last the detective started to go.

He left the gas burning, for he did not wish to leave Seth in his present helpless state at the mercy of Slump.

Nick Carter was aware that Slump had rooms in the same flat, but that fact could not account for his presence in the clerk's room.

His being there led Nick to think there was really some truth in the clerk's boast that he had possessed himself of a damaging secret relating to Coon.

Locking the door, Nick shoved the key beneath it.

The gas jet in the corridor was within reach of his hand, and he quietly shut it off.

He then placed his eye to the keyhole.

If Slump approached the bed he must see him.

A few minutes passed in silence, save for a loud snore from Seth, who was already asleep.

Then there was a stealthy football within, and an opaque body darkened the keyhole.

Slump was coming out.

The detective stepped a little back and waited.

Slump cautiously unlocked the door and slipped into the passage.

He did not see the detective, as the hall was in total darkness, but drawing a long breath of relief, locked the door again.

Stooping, he fumbled with the key in an attempt to shove it under the door, and presented the broadest part of his anatomy in a tempting position for the detective's boot.

Nick Carter could not resist a partial revenge upon Slump for his sneaking habits, and he gave him a hearty kick.

With a grunt, as the wind was knocked from his body, Slump sprawled upon the floor.

His astonishment was at first too great to permit an outcry; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and before he was on his feet Nick had glided down the stairs, and out upon the street.

Slump lighted the gas and took a good look around.

There was no one in the corridor, and he had heard no one.

"But I know I was kicked," muttered Slump, ruefully, as he rubbed the spot.

It suddenly occurred to him that whoever had bestowed such marks of disapproval upon his person must have witnessed his exit from the clerk's room, and he hastened toward his own.

Once inside, and the door locked, Slump threw himself into a chair.

His sinister face looked uglier than ever.

"Curse the luck!" he muttered, below his breath, and gritting his teeth in helpless rage. "I'm beaten at every turn. Coon was right in thinking this clerk a sieve; he'll blow the whole thing if he stays in town another day. I think I've fixed his business in one way."

Once outside the house where Seth Albers lodged, Nick Carter paused to consider what had best be done.

Seth had requested him to make his excuses to a young woman with whom he had expected to leave the city.

It was possible that the clerk's sweetheart was in his confidence, and knew what pressure he had brought to bear upon the pawnbroker to cause him to give him money and a vacation in the busy season.

After some consideration Nick concluded to follow up the possibility presented.

He was not long in reaching the street named.

Nick mounted the steps and rang the bell.

A servant appeared, and he asked for Miss Kitty Winch, saying that he came from Mr. Seth Albers.

He was conducted into a room where there was a piano, a table bearing the remains of a collation, a trunk ready packed, with a banjo in its case upon the top, and a young woman, wearing a very dissatisfied expression.

She looked at the visitor sharply, but his fashionable dress seemed to make an impression, for her expression changed.

"So, Seth Albers sent you here?" she said.

"Yes. He couldn't come."

"What is the reason he couldn't come?"

"He's sick."

"What's he sick of—me?"

"No; he was very anxious that I should come to tell you. He will be ready to go to-morrow, he thinks; but I doubt if we can spare him."

"Spare him? He has got leave."

"But in what manner did he obtain it?"

Nick spoke impressively, and the girl looked just the least bit frightened.

"I don't know," she said, hastily; "he said Mr. Coon gave him a vacation and some money."

"Yes; so he did."

"Well, then?"

"Do you know why Mr. Coon gave him the money?"

"Because he wanted to, I suppose."

"But he threatened Mr. Coon. Intimidation to obtain money is robbery."

The girl looked confused and frightened.

She did not perceive that the visitor was extracting information while appearing to communicate it.

"I'm afraid Seth has got himself into a bad mess," Nick said.

"But he didn't do anything; he found the papers by accident."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Well, he said he did."

"Did he take any money?"

"No; just papers, with a little writing on them. He told me, himself, that they wasn't negotiable—those were his very words—but that Mr. Coon would cash them at sight. Why, it was for one of those little papers that he gave Seth the money."

"Why should he give him money for a document that belonged to himself?"

The girl really grew impatient at his denseness of apprehension.

"Don't you see that the writings were something he was fearful would become known? Seth saw him working at those papers a week before, and thought it was queer, the way he acted, or something. I didn't pay much attention to what he said; but I do know that he declared he could make it warm for Mr. Coon, and that he intended to double the amount of his demands for each paper until he got up to a thousand dollars, and then we would go to Europe. And now he is liable to go to jail himself."

This was the substance of the information Nick received from Kitty Winch.

It supplied a motive for Slump's presence in the young clerk's room.

He had doubtless been hired by Coon to recover the criminating documents.

Had he succeeded?

Nick Carter rather thought the rascal had been too badly frightened to return to Seth's room that night.

Deciding to interview the clerk, and force him to give up the papers, or disclose their contents at the earliest practicable hour in the morning, Nick left the abode of Kitty Winch.

The detective hurried along through the dark and deserted streets.

He met no one and saw no signs of life.

It appeared to him, however, that he heard a cautious footfall from time to time.

It was possible that some person might be following him at a distance, and was employing caution to prevent being detected.

"Some thief," muttered the detective. "If he tackles me, he'll meet a hot reception."

He had just stopped to look back, and he now went on again.

He was about to pass a factory, a tall, solid brick edifice occupying an entire block.

The walk was in darkness more dense than elsewhere at this point, and the detective had hardly entered into its gloomy shadows, when he heard again the stealthy tread of his pursuer.

He was followed!

"Come on!" muttered Nick, below his breath; and he walked on as though unsuspicious, but listening closely to measure the distance covered by the prowler.

On, on, until only a dozen yards separated them, and there was no more doubt about the object of the sinister prowler.

He was getting too close for perfect comfort, even in the detective's idea of it, and he suddenly turned and strode swiftly to meet him.

There was a confused shuffle, telling of the scoundrel's surprise; a dull report, a momentary flash, and a bullet whistled past the detective's ear.

Then the ruffian fled.

Quick as the pistol flash the idea that the bravo's object was assassination, not simple robbery, darted through the detective's mind.

Gathering himself up, he started in pursuit.

But the ruffian had the lead; his cowardice put speed to his feet, and the detective was soon distanced.

He paused.

An instant later a dark figure flitted under a street lamp, half a block away.

A breath, and he was swallowed up again in the darkness beyond.

But Nick's quick eye had detected something familiar in the figure.

It resembled Slump in squareness of shoulders and shortness of neck, which made that worthy peculiarly recognizable.

After a moment Nick turned and went on, reaching his hotel without further adventure.

CHAPTER VI.

SLUMP'S TRIUMPH.

Nick Carter was out at an unusually early hour the following morning.

He wanted to interview Seth Albers and feared that Slump would get the start of him.

Upon arrival at the clerk's lodgings he was informed that the young man was still in his room.

"Say that I want to see him at once."

The servant returned after a few minutes, and informed him that Albers would be down as soon as he could dress.

This operation required a long time—so long that the detective began to fear Seth would take it into his head to abscond.

The door of the sitting-room where he waited opened at last.

Seth came in timidly.

His expression was downcast, and he looked apprehensively at the visitor.

He did not recognize his companion of the night before in this grave-looking man.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he said.

The detective saw that something besides the to-be-expected result of the night's debauch caused Seth's depression of spirits.

"Yes," said Nick. "I sent up for you. I'm a detective."

Seth started, his face flushed, and he became extremely confused.

"What business have you with me?" he cried, stammering.

"You found certain papers belonging to your employer?"

"N—o," said Seth, slowly.

"You need not attempt to disguise the truth from me. I have information which makes the fact indubitable. Where are the papers?"

"I don't know," exclaimed Seth, wringing his hands, while his face turned ashen pale. "I lost them—or they were stolen. I don't know which. They were in my possession last night—I won't deny that; but where they are now, Heaven only knows."

"Slump got them, by all that's unlucky!" were the words that rose to the detective's lips.

Aloud, he said:

"You had the papers last night?"

"Yes."

"When you went to bed?"

"Yes—at least I think so. In fact, I was drunk; there's no use denying it."

"Not a bit. Where were they?"

"In my pocketbook."

"Was that stolen?"

"No."

"You are sure the papers are gone?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective was silent for a moment.

It was plain to him that Jim Slump had returned to the clerk's room, and had secured the telltale papers.

"What does Mr. Conway say about those papers?" Seth asked, his lips trembling nervously.

"I don't know."

"Didn't he send you here?"

"No."

"But you are a detective?"

"Yes; but I'm on the other side."

Seth's face brightened.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, breaking into a laugh. "I thought you had come to arrest me."

"I am in search of evidence to be used against Silas. You had the papers in your possession—now still have them. It may become my duty to lock you up until they are brought to light."

"Upon my word, I haven't them—I swear I haven't!" cried Seth, earnestly.

Seth looked around in a bewildered way, as he spoke. As he chanced to direct his eyes toward the street below the window, his gaze suddenly became fixed, and his pallor increased tenfold.

Nick Carter had been watching him closely, and he knew that something of a startling nature must be occurring outside to attract his attention so abruptly.

One leaped and carried him to the window.

Looking out, he saw Slump, accompanied by a policeman.

They were in the act of entering the house.

Seth uttered a groan, and fell into a chair, covering his face with his hand.

In an amazing short space of time the door was thrown open, and Slump, closely followed by the officer, entered.

"That is the man," said Slump, pointing toward the clerk.

"Is your name Seth Albers?" said the officer.

Seth only groaned.

"I have a warrant for you."

"What's the charge?" asked Seth, in a husky voice.

"Larceny from your employer, Silas Coon. It is my duty to search your baggage, and you will accompany me to your room."

Seth arose mechanically.

He turned a dazed look upon the detective, who was leaning against the window-ledge, his face containing as little expression as though he had been carved out of stone.

"I'd like to speak with this gentleman for a moment," said Seth, wetting his parched lips with his tongue before he could force his utterance.

Slump suddenly woke up.

"No, no!" he cried. "Officer, don't permit it."

"Why not?" demanded the officer, who appeared to have little respect for Slump.

"That man was with Albers last night. He is his accomplice."

"You dastardly liar!" cried Nick Carter, in a tone that caused Slump to fairly shrink in his clothes. "Where were you last night, you treacherous cur?"

"If I am not mistaken, you are Nick Carter, the detective from New York?" said Seth.

"Yes."

"I thought so, when you first said you were working up evidence against Coon," the young man went on. "I have seen your name in the papers frequently in connection with old Coon's murder."

Nick nodded for the speaker to continue.

"Now, I think this is a put-up job against me. Coon thinks I know too much, and he is trying to ruin my character."

"Well?"

"I haven't any friends in the city, and I'm liable to be sent up, I suppose."

"Come to the point," urged Nick. "The officer is getting impatient."

"Well, sir, the point is this: I sleep in the office usually. On the night Coon was killed, I was awakened by some one entering the front door. I looked out and saw Silas Coon. He lighted the gas over his desk and sat down in a chair, looking strange, and so pale that I thought he was ill.

"After a while he got up and came toward the glass door opening into the room where I slept. I didn't care to have him catch me watching him, so I tumbled back into bed and pretended to be fast asleep.

"He stood looking at me for a few minutes, and then went back to his desk, and sat down in the same position as before, with his head upon his hand. He remained that way so long that I got tired watching him, and went back to bed and fell asleep.

"I don't know how long I slept, but, when I awoke I saw the gas burning over his desk, and heard the scratching of his pen on the paper. I began to watch his again. He was writing on note-paper, not at all in his usual way, for he is a rapid penman, but slowly and as though he wanted to get every letter perfect.

"After a while he seemed satisfied with what he had done, read the last sheet he had written, and at last doubled it up, and put it in his pocket. The other papers he gathered up and started as though to burn them; but seemed to change his mind, and placed them in a private drawer in his desk.

"Then he left the office, and I suppose he went to bed. It was nearly morning then.

"Of course I was curious to know what he had been writing so secretly, and when I swept out, it occurred to me to look at his blotter.

"He had taken a new one, and it showed many words, not at all in his usual hand. I put this blotter on my own desk and studied it, as I had time. When the report of Mr. Washington Coon's murder became public, my curiosity increased, and when the letter said to be found by Slump"—the clerk turned instinctively to point his finger at that eminent rascal as he spoke—"was printed in the papers, I became convinced that it was a forgery. Silas Coon wrote that letter himself. I'll swear to it, and last night I could have produced copies of the very letter."

Seth ceased speaking.

He was greatly excited.

At this moment the officer stepped forward.

Slump had become more and more uneasy as the conversation had continued, and at last the officer was forced to comply with his demand that the prisoner and Nick should be separated.

"Just one moment," said the latter. "Now," he continued, turning again upon Seth.

"Well," he said, "will you make affidavit of what you have told me?"

"I will."

"Good!"

"But I must go to jail, I suppose?" moaned Seth.

"You must. I think I shall be able to secure your release when you are examined. I presume there is nothing in your trunk that can be used against you?"

"No, sir; I'm not so fresh as that comes to."

Seth was then led off to his room, and as there was no objection made to his doing so, Nick Carter followed.

"Your keys," said the officer, after a cursory examination of the room.

Seth produced the key to his trunk.

The officer unlocked it, and began throwing out the contents upon the floor.

Wearing apparel and all the little odds and ends a young man is liable to collect were thrown out carelessly upon the floor.

The search had nearly ended now, the bottom of the trunk was in sight, and a scornful expression rested upon Seth's face.

It really appeared that there was no stolen property in the trunk, and the detective was more surprised than anybody else, for he more than half expected that Slump had put up some job.

"All right," said the officer, tapping the inside of the trunk to show that it had no false bottom. "Nothing here."

He threw the last article—a flannel shirt neatly rolled up—out upon the floor.

It struck rather heavy for wool goods, and a slight jingle was heard.

Quick as a flash, the detective glanced at Slump.

An expression of peculiar slyness flitted across his face.

The shirt was unrolled, and there, attached to the inside by metal tags used by merchants, were several gold watches and jewelry of every description.

Mr. Silas Coon claimed in his affidavit that his clerk had been systematically robbing him for several months—here was the evidence.

Why describe the confusion of Seth, his declarations of innocence and denunciations of his rascally employer?

He was led away, and as Slump disappeared he turned his head over his shoulder to cast a wink at Nick Carter.

The latter was indignant; but he must perforce allow Slump to triumph for the time being.

When arraigned for examination, Seth Albers weakened, and confessed to having stolen certain articles from the pawnshop; but he insisted that none of the articles were among those found in his trunk, and declared that he did not know how they came there.

Of course he went back to jail to await his trial, and was soon after visited by Nick Carter with a person properly qualified to take his deposition.

This he gave in the substance before related.

"How did you happen to admit that you abstracted certain articles from Coon?" asked Nick, when he was ready to depart.

"I was scared; besides, they have been traced," answered the youth, gloomily. "But if I was to die this minute, I would swear I never took those things found in my trunk."

"You had better see a lawyer," said Nick, as he left him to his reflections.

CHAPTER VII.

A BATTLE AGAINST ODDS.

Nick Carter was anxious to learn the result of George's flight.

That the young man might be driven to some rash deed in resisting arrest, seemed more than probable.

Nick did not care to inquire of the police, so he must wait. After completing his business with Seth Albers he went to a saloon on Atwater Street, where Bill Jenkins, George's friend and ally, made his headquarters.

Jenkins was not in the saloon when the detective reached the place.

In the course of half an hour, however, during which Nick Carter waited, he made his appearance.

He looked troubled and uneasy.

The detective motioned him into a chair at a table, little removed from observation.

"I suppose you've heard," whispered Jenkins, in accents of alarm. "It's all up now."

"Then he has been taken?"

"Not yet; but he will be. He can't escape."

"He has so far. But even if he is captured, it is of little consequence. I suppose he had no hand in the killing of the old man?"

Nick was proceeding to ask other questions, to which Jenkins could return but little information, when he noticed an individual who had just entered the saloon.

He was a mulatto, with sharp black eyes, a scanty mustache, and gold rings in his ears.

He was a well dressed, well built man, and had a resolute carriage of body, with a sinister cast of features that at once caught Nick's attention.

He called for whiskey, and while filling his glass opened conversation with the bartender on the subject attracting most popular interest—the affray at the Red Wolf, and the daring escape of George Packer.

"I tell you, he's a hummer," he cried, seemingly highly delighted with George's exploit. "I rode up Grand River just after he'd give 'em the slip. Wasn't dey hot?—well I guess so!"

"Has he been captured?" asked the drink mixer.

"I guess not. I don't believe he killed old Coon, though."

"You don't?"

The darky shook his head.

"I thought that was a sure thing."

"Not much; an' you jest mark what I say," and the fellow's voice sank to a sibilant whisper, while his eyes flashed with animation. "The right party'll be found out before you or I am much older."

He ended with a laugh, as though disturbed by the barkeeper's unfeigned surprise at his earnestness.

"Of course I doan know anything about it," he continued, rather hastily. "That's jest my opinion."

"Do you know that man?" whispered Nick to his companion.

"No; I never saw him before."

The mulatto had not appeared to notice the men at the table, and, flinging a ten-cent piece upon the bar, he lounged toward the door.

Taking a brief leave of Shock, Nick walked out after the mulatto.

He had stopped near the curb to light a cigarette.

"I would like to talk with you," said Nick.

The mulatto looked him over, his black eyes half closed.

The detective did not like his appearance.

"Sure," said the fellow. "I ain't afraid to talk with anybody—even a dun or a cholera suspect. I suppose if you've anything to say that'll take time, you won't object to standin' treat?"

"No, I don't object to that."

The fellow laughed, showing his white teeth, and suggested that the detective follow him.

They entered the office of a hotel near by, and Nick's new acquaintance led the way through to the bar.

"Two cocktails, Billy," he said, in a patronizing fashion, to the bartender, and drawing a couple of chairs to the window he sat down in one, leaving the other for the detective.

The latter sat down, looking grave and businesslike.

Despite the mulatto's impudent assumption of ease, he saw that he was nervous.

"I understand that you know something of the murder of Washington Coon, on the night of June sixth," said Nick, abruptly, when the mulatto's order had been executed, and the bartender had retired out of hearing.

The fellow gave a start as though much surprised.

"I don't know who should tell you that," he said.

"Is it true?"

He did not answer at once.

"It may be true, and ag'in it may not," he finally said. "I haven't said I knew anything about it."

"Not to me."

"Nor anybody else."

He spoke in a tone as though not quite sure of this, and the detective thought it well to grow more positive.

It is not necessary to give their conversation further in detail.

There was a great deal of skirmishing on both sides.

The mulatto showed himself extremely cunning; but he finally admitted that he held a clew to the perpetrator of the murder.

His story was as follows:

He had been out on Grand River Avenue on the night Coon was killed, and was walking back, because he had no money to pay carfare.

He described the night as very dark, and when he was passing the pawnbroker's residence, and saw a man upon the high board fence, separating the premises from the one adjoining, he could not tell at first whether it was a man, indeed, or a shadow.

The object dropped to the ground, however, on the opposite side of the fence, passed through the gate, and hastened away.

He had a pretty fair look at the man, whom he described as six feet in height, and thick set.

The witness of his escape had thought that the fellow was a thief, and had hurried on, fearing to be implicated in the affair.

As he passed the point where the fellow had leaped the fence into the road, he saw something glitter beside the walk, and stooping to pick it up, found that it was a knife.

It was a species of weapon called a dirk, but bore no evidence of recent use.

He had carried the weapon home, and the next day had heard that a murder had been committed.

This was the substance of the mulatto's disclosure.

He said that his name was Pedro Gunn, that he was a barber, and had a shop of his own on Lysander Street.

For this information, providing it assisted in convicting the suspected person, the detective had promised a considerable share of the reward offered for the apprehension of Mr. Coon's slayer.

It required some time and close cross-questioning to elicit this disclosure, Pedro claiming to fear the vengeance of the person he suspected.

He declared that he had since recognized the man he had seen leap the fence, upon the street, and that he frequently passed his shop.

He also agreed to turn the knife, which bore some curious marks, over to the detective, providing he would come down to his shop that evening to get it, and would give him a sum of money.

When he had described the situation of his shop, and his hour of closing, for not until then, he said, would he be at liberty to finish the business, he asked the detective to loan him fifty cents, and getting it, went away seeming in good humor.

Nick Carter then had an opportunity to consider what he had better do.

It was plain to him that Pedro was an exceedingly slippery individual, and that he could be dangerous as well, if it was for his advantage.

He wished to learn something about the barber's antecedents and habits, however, before going further with the affair.

He proceeded at once to his hotel, changed his clothes, and further disguised himself, and then started off for Lysander Street, to pick up what information he could regarding Pedro Gunn.

Pedro Gunn really had a shop on Lysander Street.

He had not been working the detective for a small sum of money.

Nick Carter passed his place of business and looked in.

It was in a basement.

He saw Pedro at work.

He had his coat off, apron on, and looked more like a barber, less like a desperado.

It was a dark place, and not very well furnished as far as the detective could see.

The detective walked on.

He entered the shops of one or two tradesmen in the vicinity and made inquiries as to Pedro Gunn. Every one seemed afraid of him. The barber had evidently intimidated the whole neighborhood.

As the detective started uptown he met a patrolman making his rounds.

To complete his inquiry, he accosted him.

"Yes, I know Gunn," said the officer. "He is a dangerous man, and has given me some trouble. He has committed at least two murderous assaults since he came here, but has frightened his victims so bad that they dare enter no complaint against him. I regard him as a bad man."

This was decisive.

Nick Carter returned to his hotel very thoughtful.

But he was still determined to meet the appointment.

When he left his room at the hotel that night he had provided himself against all chances.

He wore a shirt of fine steel rings linked together.

It was impenetrable to a knife, and would stop a pistol bullet, unless at very short range.

He was further prepared with a pair of revolvers, a bowie-knife, a dark lantern and handcuffs.

In fact he thought, with a smile, that he was a walking arsenal, and had done Pedro, the mulatto, more honor than he deserved.

Gunn had said that he usually closed his shop at twelve o'clock on Saturday nights.

The detective timed his arrival so well that it only wanted ten minutes of that hour when he walked up to the place.

The neighboring shops were all closed, and the streets deserted.

There was a light in Gunn's shop, however, and the detective went down the steps.

Pedro was sitting on the footrest, before his chair, smoking a cigarette.

A colored woman was counting over some money, at a small drawer, in front of a third chair.

Gunn winked at the detective to let him know that he was recognized.

The woman was quickly dismissed, her husband telling her to go upstairs, and that he would close the shop.

"You live upstairs?" said Nick.

"Yes; it's convenient for my wife."

He proceeded to pull down the curtains.

"No more shaves to-night," he remarked.

Nick Carter sat down and watched him as he counted over the day's receipts.

He gave Nick the fifty cents he had borrowed earlier in the day, and seemed to be in a jubilant mood.

The detective laughed as he received the fifty cents.

He had not expected that.

"Oh, I never beat anybody out of fifty cents," said Gunn, with a grin. "A dollar might be some object."

Not a word had been said hitherto about the motive for the visit; but now Pedro remarked:

"I suppose you'd like to see that dirk?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've been thinking it over, and made up my mind that I let you off too easy."

"What do you mean?"

"You promised me a share of the reward?"

"Yes."

"It won't come to more than a hundred."

"I presume not. But that——"

"I know what you would say," the mulatto interrupted. "But if it's more than I should expect, it doesn't pay me for the risk I'm taking in accusing this man. He's a tough one."

"Well," said Nick, assuming more indifference than he felt, "you can do as you like."

"Oh, I'm going to hand over the dirk," Gunn hastened to say, "and it will prove a big piece of evidence, but you must promise one thing."

"What's that?"

"Not to let it be known that I'm a witness till you are all ready to pinch the chap. I don't want to be found in a dark alley with my brains knocked out."

"I can easily agree to that," Nick assured him.

"That's all right. I think you mean to deal fair."

During this conversation Pedro had been leaning upon the back of a chair at the far end of the shop.

Nick Carter was keeping a close watch upon him to guard against treachery.

The fellow's manner was sinister.

He seemed to be talking to gain time.

Suddenly he took a step away from the detective and coughed, as though to clear his throat.

At that instant, by some unseen hand the electric wires were disconnected, and the lights went out.

A mocking laugh of devilish triumph broke from the mulatto's lips.

Relying upon his great strength, he threw himself upon the detective, aiming a thrust at his side.

The blade slipped on the steel shirt, cutting the bravo's hand, and Nick Carter seized him in a grasp he could not break.

Others were coming to his assistance, and the detective backed against the wall, dragging the mulatto with him.

The latter struggled desperately, but Nick was a giant in strength.

Bringing the ruffian's hands together behind his back, he handcuffed him.

"Not a step farther, or your life!" he cried, in clear, ringing tones. "Your pal is at my mercy. If you approach I will cut his head from his body."

He had drawn his knife, and placed the point against Pedro's throat.

"For God's sake, boys," exclaimed the horrified barber, as Nick pressed the point of the knife through his skin, "he's cutting my throat by inches."

Nick had succeeded in getting his back against the wall, and as his legs were locked around those of the barber the scoundrel was at his mercy.

There seemed to be at least two more ruffians in the room.

They had doubtless been hiding in a rear room, the door of which had been closed, and had entered silently after turning off the lights.

Pedro's cries caused them to stop their advance, and they now consulted in whispers.

Nick began to move gradually along the wall toward the door.

He knew that the key was in the lock; for when he had been securing it, the treacherous mulatto had been so closely watched by his intended victim that he dared not remove the key.

If he could reach the door, Nick thought he might easily effect his escape, and carry off the barber a prisoner as well.

As the ruffians understood his intentions they sprang forward.

The detective had changed his knife for a pistol, and promptly fired in the direction of the thugs.

There was a yell, telling that one of them had been shot, followed by curses, and then a hoarse voice called to the barber:

"Drop on yer face, Pedro!"

Pedro attempted to obey, but the detective held him up by main force with his left hand, while he crouched behind him.

The pistols cracked, the barber uttered a scream of mortal agony and fell forward upon his face.

Nick took advantage of the confusion and noise, and made a dash for the street door.

The ruffians detected his movements, and before he could get the door open, although he had already turned the key, they were upon him.

One of them grappled with him, while the other struck him a vicious blow upon the head with his pistol.

A terrible struggle followed in the dark.

Nick Carter was battling for his life, while the desperadoes seemed equally determined to deprive him of it.

They could not use their revolvers for fear of wounding one another, but in this respect the detective had no advantage, his pistol hand having been grasped at the first onset.

Bending his head to ward the blows, Nick suddenly let go his hold of the ruffian upon his left, and grasped his knife.

Summoning all his force, he drove the knife deep into the breast of the other.

He uttered a scream, released his hold, and in clutching at something to keep from falling, dragged his accomplice down with him.

Nick threw the door open and dashed up the steps.

Dizzy from the blows he had received, and bleeding from half a dozen wounds upon his head and neck, he dared not remain to secure his victory.

He wished to cause the arrest of the desperadoes, however, and ran in the direction of the nearest police station.

He had not proceeded half a block when he ran full into the arms of a patrolman.

He listened to the detective's account with the most provoking *sang froid*.

It appeared to Nick that the man must have heard the pistol shots.

He declared he had not, however, and rang up an alarm in the most leisurely manner.

"Come back with me," said Nick. "We can easily take the ruffians."

"Assistance will be here in a minute," replied the officer, stoically.

"It may be too late; there will be no danger, as two of them are badly wounded."

The patrolman was not inclined to risk it, and cursing him heartily, the detective, whom the cool air had revived, was starting back alone, when the cautious officer ordered him to wait.

"Remain where ye air," he growled, taking a grip of his club.

Nick Carter thought it policy to obey this mandate; but he resolved to inquire into the officer's actions when opportunity was fitting.

Assistance came finally, and a strong body of police entered the barber shop.

It presented a striking appearance when the lights were turned on.

There was blood upon the door where the last struggle had taken place, and near by lay the man whom Nick Carter had stabbed.

He was just breathing his last, his eyes already glazing in death.

His accomplices had disappeared.

Officers searched the house, and the barber's wife was awakened.

She seemed little moved when informed of what had occurred.

Pedro had not been seen by her, she declared, since she had left the shop at twelve o'clock. She was asleep, and had not heard the shooting.

She came downstairs, and appeared much more disturbed by finding a mirror broken by a pistol shot, and blood upon the furniture and woodwork, than by the dead body near the door, or the absence of her husband.

Nick questioned her closely, but she seemed really to know nothing of her husband's movements.

"Oh, he'll turn up in a day or two," was all she would say when asked for an opinion as to where he had taken refuge.

She would not speak again, and Nick was forced to desist.

The dead ruffian was known to the police.

He was a petty criminal.

The detective returned uptown toward his hotel, his mind busy with the strange events of the day.

That he had nearly fallen the victim of a shrewdly planned scheme was certain.

Undoubtedly, Pedro, the mulatto, had shadowed him from the Atwater Street saloon, and uttered the semi-confidential remarks to the bartender for the purpose of attracting the detective's interest.

The trap had carried out his part of the plan with great success, and it was only Nick Carter's extreme caution and immense strength—two things the desperadoes seemed not to have taken into sufficient account—that had preserved his life.

That there must be some powerful motive for the persistent attacks upon his life was certain; and to the detective it appeared quite as certain that it was his connection with the murder case that caused the ruffians to take all that pains about him.

One thing had been gained by the dangers he had passed through.

A person who had a connection with the band of desperadoes was known.

The barber, wounded as he was, must be taken ultimately, and this would probably lead to the detection of his accomplices.

The detective reached his hotel, and went to bed.

The morrow was Sunday, but he determined to make an attempt to trace Pedro.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW LIGHT ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

Early the subsequent morning the detective hunted up Bill Jenkins, and dispatched him to the Red Wolf to learn if possible the movements of Dan upon the previous night.

While awaiting his return the detective concluded to pay a visit to Dr. Sanders.

Packer, it was now known, had made good his escape from the police.

He was believed to be wounded, and when last seen was in the vicinity of Dr. Sanders' residence.

The search for the fugitive continued active, and he was believed to be still in the city.

The fact that the doctor was a friend of Mrs. Coon's, coupled with the fugitive's disappearance in the vicinity, led many people to think that he had assisted in the escape.

Nick Carter thought he would learn the truth, if possible, and not long after the idea entered his mind, he was ringing the bell at the Sanders' residence.

The doctor was at home, and the detective was shown into his presence.

Dr. Sanders assumed his grave, professional look, as the visitor was shown in.

He instantly recognized the detective, although he had seen him but once before.

"Take a seat," he said, as the door closed behind the servant. "I'm glad to see you."

Nick sat down.

"From what I noticed in the papers," he remarked, "I presume you are having some trouble over young Packer's affair."

"Trouble enough," grumbled the doctor. "But I'm just learning how to deal with them. Detectives have been coming to the house every half hour all day long since Packer escaped. I ordered my man to turn the hose on that Slump if he came again, and this morning he did it."

The doctor broke into a laugh.

"The impudent rascal!" he exclaimed. "He actually accused me of helping Packer to escape."

Dr. Sanders winked, coughed, and offered Nick a cigar.

"But I should really like to know about that escape," said the detective, as he lighted the weed.

"Well," replied the doctor, "I presume you may be trusted to keep it secret, and it is necessary that you communicate with him. It is as much as my professional reputation is worth if it became known that I had a hand in the affair.

"I was aroused Thursday morning by men in the yard, and looking out of the window saw them running about in confusion.

"I arose and dressed hastily, fearing the house was on fire; but as I went around to the back of the house. I was told that a murderer had escaped, and they thought he had concealed himself in the house.

"Naturally I was quite as anxious to have him found as they were to search for him; and after they had posted their men, so that he could not escape from the house, two or three policemen accompanied me about the rooms.

"We made a careful search from cellar to garret, but no one could be found, and the policemen had to give it up, although they thought it certain that the fugitive had entered.

"Well, after they had gone a while, my wife informed me that the fugitive was George Packer, and that he had actually entered the house by a window left open by a servant. He had been met by Mrs. Coon, and the two women had hidden him in a secret closet under the stairs.

"If I was not morally certain that the young man is innocent," said the good-natured physician, "I should not have assisted in his escape; but there he remained in the closet until night, while the detectives were trying to pick up his trail.

"Of course, he could not remain there long, and the women hit upon a scheme. He was to conceal himself in Mrs. Coon's house across the way, which has not been occupied since the murder.

"He slipped into the house that night, and has remained there since, undisturbed as far as I know."

"I should think he would prefer to give himself up," said Nick Carter. "It would tell in his favor if the case ever comes up for trial."

"So I advised, but he appears to dread the jail more than death. He will do something desperate before he allows himself to be taken."

After some further conversation, the detective departed.

He met Jenkins at a place appointed, and the moment he caught the man's eye saw that he had a story to tell.

"So you have discovered something?" he remarked.

"Yes."

"Well, to the point."

"I went out to the Red Wolf, as you directed, and hit the hostler for a job. They happened to want a man and employed me without asking for any references. The first thing they set me to do was to clean a big spot of red paint off a horse's shoulder. I thought at first it had been blood, but it was paint, sure enough, and they told me that Dan Wolf had rode the horse out the night before, and had brought him in at three o'clock in the morning, badly used up, with the daub of paint upon him."

"Did you learn anything more?"

"I found that there had been blood marks upon the horse, and that he had been daubed with paint to cover it up."

The detective became thoughtful.

A suspicion that Dan Wolf had been one of his assailants the night before had been lurking in his mind and this confirmed it.

He saw that Jenkins, who was quite well satisfied with his new *rôle* of detective, had something more to say, and asked him to conclude.

"I bustled around the stable with a will," he said; "and when dinner time came I went into the house. The man who had employed me told the landlady that I was the new hostler, and she forthwith ordered me upstairs to call Dan down to dinner.

"I found out his room after a while, and knocked. He growled out something. I gave my message, and he unlocked the door, being just then ready to come downstairs.

"I crowded partly in to get a look at his room, and saw that the water in the washbowl had a red tinge, and that there was a shirt or something on the floor, that he seemed to have been washing.

"Wolf threw me fairly out of the room, before I could see more, and locked the door. He was savage and suspicious. I was glad to get away from him, and that's all I've got to tell."

"Do you intend to go back there?" asked Nick, after a pause.

"Yes; I guess I will. It's as good a berth as I can find, and I may pick up some more information."

The detective smiled, and told Jenkins where his friend was hiding.

"He'll be safe enough there, I suppose," he remarked. "The police would hardly think of looking there for the suspected murderer, would they?"

"I should think not."

The two soon separated, taking different ways.

Jenkins' report had given the detective fresh food for thought.

It is not probable that Dan had ventured to take the wounded mulatto to the hotel.

That the horse had been used to convey the wounded man now appeared certain.

The reader may be interested in learning the circumstances of their escape, and Pedro Gunn's whereabouts.

As soon as the detective had fairly escaped from the mulatto's shop, the only ruffian who remained upon his feet sprang a light.

It was Dan Wolf, the leader and prime mover in the dastardly plot.

Of his companions, one was dying, while the mulatto had received a bullet in his lip, and was unable to stand without assistance.

"I must get out of this," cried Wolf, with a volley of imprecations. "D——n him! He's got clear off."

"Do you mean to desert me?" cried the mulatto.

Wolf had already started toward the rear door.

At this appeal he turned, and for a moment hesitated.

"You can't walk," he said. "I never desert a pal when there's a chance to help him; but what can I do with you?"

"Take me with you," pleaded Gunn. "Anything to keep me out of the hands of the police."

Dan uttered a growl; but he seized the mulatto in his

strong arms and bore him into a rear room, up a short flight of steps, and into a disused and dilapidated stable, in the rear of the building.

A horse, saddled and bridled, stood in one of the stalls.

Wolf was quickly in the saddle, with the wounded man in front of him.

The mulatto nearly fainted as they dashed out of the stable, but he now took a drink from a flask Wolf carried, and bound his limb tightly with a cord, checking the flow of blood.

On they went, through the dark alley, until the street was reached, when Dan urged the horse forward more rapidly.

Wolf stopped in front of a house at last, and got down.

Then he lifted Pedro to the ground, and helped him to hobble through the gateway.

But progression was too slow, and the big ruffian threw the other upon his shoulder as though he had been a bag of oats, and hastened through the yards and into a shed in the rear of a house fronting the opposite side of the block.

Here he stopped to breathe, holding the mulatto up in the darkness.

"Nobody lives here," he said. "And it ain't liable to be taken for a while. You jest keep close, and yer all right."

"But my wound," groaned Pedro. "I can't lay here on the ground; and what will I eat?"

Wolf swore impatiently.

"I've got a key to the house," he said. "There's lots of beds there, and you can dress your own hurt. The people ain't been out of the house long, and there's likely to be enough to eat for a day or two laying around. As soon as I can, safely, I'll come and see ye."

He mounted a short flight of stairs and unlocked the door.

Then he carried the mulatto into the house.

It was dark as a pocket, but the ruffian seemed pretty familiar with the plan of the rooms.

He assisted the mulatto through two or three rooms, and at last opened a door.

"There's a bed here," speaking in a whisper, although the house was profoundly silent, and it did not seem probable that there was a living thing there to overhear him.

"Hist!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

He fell to trembling, and the mulatto could hear his thick breath.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," whispered Wolf; "I thought I heard a step off there."

"Off where?"

"Toward the front of the house. Hist! do you hear nothing?"

"No—yes—it's rats."

"Rats!" exclaimed Wolf, in unaccountable horror. "Hah! It's coming this way! Hear him! Can't you see?"

The panic-stricken desperado uttered a yell that echoed through the deserted rooms, and breaking from the clinging hands of his pal, with such violence that the mulatto fell to the floor, fled toward the open air.

Pedro struck his head against the edge of the door in falling, and became unconscious.

It was late in the morning when he awoke, and the sun was shining in through the window, lending a cheerfulness to the room.

The ruffian took a drink from his flask and began to examine his wound.

The sight of his own blood caused the ruffian to shudder, but he bathed the wound with whiskey, and bound it up.

He had just completed this when he heard a footfall somewhere overhead.

He recollected Wolf's terrified flight, and he leaned against the bed, trembling.

Yes, the sounds were approaching.

He heard the footsteps descend the stairs, and come directly toward the room.

"Hello, there!" cried a voice.

Pedro started at the sound, and searched for his pistol.

It had been dropped in last night's scuffle, and he cast a despairing glance around for some weapon.

He uttered no reply, however, and a moment later a man appeared in the doorway.

It was George Packer.

Wolf had deposited his wounded pal in the pawnbroker's residence, and the two fugitives were face to face.

George looked around the room, not seeing the mulatto at first, as he was cowering half under the bed, and as his eye caught sight of him, a faint smile flitted across his face.

Somewhat reassured, Pedro crept out, and for a moment they eyed each other wonderingly.

"And who may you be?" George demanded, at last.

"I'm bad hurt, whoever I be," responded the mulatto.

"So I discovered last night."

"Then you know when I came?" he cried, looking up quickly.

"Yes; your arrival was accompanied by enough noise, surely."

Pedro had resumed his cunning now.

It was probable that this man did not know but he had reached the house alone, and it seemed that he did not intend to expose him.

"You don't intend to give me up, do you?" he said.

"Give you up? To whom?"

"The cops."

A bitter look crossed the young man's face.

He thought he had a right to be angry with "the cops."

"I'm a fugitive like yourself," he said, frankly.

Pedro told a cunning tale to account for his wound.

His antagonist was, of course, in the wrong; but he had been chased by the police; they had shot him, and he had crept into the house to die.

His story drew George's compassion, and he tended the fellow with as much care as though he had been his dearest friend, sharing with him the pittance of food which his friends had managed to convey to him.

As for the mulatto, he watched him like a cat, and was uneasy when he was for a moment out of his sight, his traitorous mind fearing betrayal.

In this manner the day passed away, silent and dreary to the two prisoners in the deserted house.

Little by little the cunning rogue wormed himself into Packer's confidence, until in the end he was master of his secrets.

He waited for the coming of night, which would bring Dan Wolf back to the house, as he knew the desperado would not dare remain long from the confidant of his crimes, and he busied his mind in planning schemes to conceal his coming from his new friend, whom he was ready to throw into the power of his enemies as a reward for his compassion to himself.

CHAPTER IX.

PLOTTING.

About eight o'clock that evening Nick Carter was called to the telephone.

"Hello! is that Detective Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"I'm Jenkins."

"Go on."

"Dan Wolf is getting ready to go out. I saw him pack some cold meat and bread in a sack. He took a big bottle of whiskey and some cigars out of the bar. Shall I follow him?"

"Yes."

"But how can I communicate with you?"

"Telephone here."

"All right."

Wishing his new ally good luck, the detective left the telephone.

We will accompany Jenkins.

He had dogged Wolf all day at a distance, and was certain that he had some expedition on hand.

Dan was uneasy and suspicious, and though the other kept out of his way as much as possible, when they did meet a scowl rose to the desperado's brow.

When it was fairly dark Dan walked out of the house.

He wore a loose coat, and had concealed under it the package which had excited Jenkins' suspicions.

The latter slipped out of the side door, and, taking the opposite side of the street, followed him.

Dan walked along slowly toward the city, puffing his cigar.

The night was delightfully pleasant and clear.

Objects were plainly discernible at a considerable distance, and the shadow was not forced to follow his man too close for safety.

When he reached the corner below the residence of the late Washington Coon, Dan turned down the side street.

He went directly to the house before which he had tied his horse the night before, opened the gate quietly and disappeared.

Jenkins saw him enter the yard, and he soon came up.

There was a light in the house, and he gazed at the windows, longing for some indication that Wolf was within.

But as he chanced to glance up he saw the ruffian climbing the fence in the rear.

"Ah!" exclaimed Jenkins, half aloud.

Wolf dropped out of sight in a brief instant, and was lost among the shadows.

His pursuer had now no doubt but that he was near his destination.

He must not lose sight of him at all hazards.

He ran through the yard, climbed the fence near the spot where Dan had passed, and came up in time to hear the sound of a softly closing door.

Then for the first time Jenkins realized where he was.

He was aware that the house had been deserted by the family, and guessed at once that Wolf's wounded pal was there concealed.

After an instant's breathless pause, Jenkins slipped silently away.

He must warn the detective.

Leaving him to execute this, we will follow Wolf into the house.

He found the rear door unlocked as he had left it in his fright the night before, and opening it he crept cautiously toward the room where he had deposited the mulatto.

The latter was alone.

Packer had gone upstairs a short time previously.

He had arranged a little code of signals by means of which he could communicate with Mrs. Coon, in the house opposite, and his attention was fully occupied.

The mulatto, wishing to get his companion out of the way, had pretended that he was going to sleep, and there was little danger of the pair being disturbed by our adventurer.

The mulatto was waiting impatiently in the dark, listening to the least footfall.

"Hist!" breathed Wolf, as he reached the door.

"Come in," his confederate replied, in the same cautious whisper. "But be quiet—there's somebody about."

"What do you mean?" asked the ruffian, apprehensively, as he moved stealthily up to Pedro, who sat in a chair at the open window.

The mulatto soon told all he knew, and all he suspected of his fellow in hiding.

Dan listened eagerly.

"I wish I could see him," he whispered.

He questioned Gunn until he had obtained a minute description of Packer, and was certain of his real identity.

Then the two villains put their heads together, so to speak, and concocted a plan.

Packer must be handed over to the police.

How could this be managed without the mulatto's presence in the house being discovered by the officers?

It was determined that Wolf should go in search of Slump, and bring him to the place.

"Has he got any weapons, do you know?" asked Dan.

"Yes, he has—a revolver."

"Don't you think you could get it?"

The mulatto shook his head, but agreed to make the attempt.

"Hush!" he whispered, suddenly.

Some one was descending the stairs.

"He's coming," said Wolf. "I'll go out the window."

It was open, and he dropped to the ground just as Packer entered the room.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

"What?" asked Pedro, who had turned around at his entrance.

"I thought I heard some one speaking."

"I guess I must have been talkin' to myself. I've been asleep—I wonder what my wife thinks about my being gone all this time?"

"Thinks you're dead, perhaps. What do you intend to do?"

"About what?"

"Why, you don't intend to stay here?"

"How can I get away?"

"Sure enough."

"If I could get word to my friends they'd get me out of the house without being seen. But as I can't do that, I'll have to stay till I can walk."

He began to speculate on the length of time his cure would require, wishing to keep his companion quiet, and allay any suspicions that might be lurking in his mind.

In the meantime Dan was making good use of his time.

He knew Slump's haunts, and had no difficulty in finding him.

But when the expedition was proposed Slump hesitated.

"I'm out of luck," he said. "Everything has gone wrong with me lately. I don't propose to run any chances. This man is worth money to me, and I ain't going to risk losing it to save the colored feller. If the police overlook him, it's all right; I shan't point him out. But if they see him, who can help it?"

Wolf growled an oath beneath his breath.

"See here," he said, clutching Slump's arm, for the man had already turned to walk away. "That colored man knows too much for me to let him fall into the clutches of the police."

"Well?"

"I'll go with you," exclaimed Dan. "I'll pitch into him. I suppose you wouldn't be afraid to snap the darbies on 'im if I held him for you?"

"But suppose he puts a slug into you before you work this?"

"If he does, it's my lookout."

"Yes, and then I might stop the next chunk of lead."

"You're a great detective, you are!" cried Dan, in a tone of huge disgust. "But if you don't get the worst of it for this, it'll be because I can't help it."

"Well, well," said Slump, "I'll go."

He did go, much against his will.

Wolf was impatient, and strode along toward the house at such a rate that Slump had some difficulty in keeping up with him.

They passed through the gate, and around to the window by which the ruffian had quitted the house.

Leaving Slump at a little distance, Wolf stole up to the window.

It was still open.

He uttered a low whistle, and a head appeared at the window.

"Who is there?" whispered the mulatto.

"Me—Wolf," answered that worthy. "Where is he?"

"Upstairs."

Dan went back for Slump, who seemed determined not to make a move in the affair unless he was driven to it.

They crept cautiously into the house.

"Whereabouts is he?" asked Dan.

"In the room fronting the street."

Dan started.

"I shook the cartridges out of his revolver," whispered the mulatto. "So if he draws a bead on you, ye needn't fear 'im."

Slump chuckled.

"That's better," he muttered. "You know the lay of the house, Wolf; so go ahead."

They crept out of the room and through the passage, one behind the other.

The mulatto sat in the dark behind the window waiting expectantly for sounds of the struggle he knew must come.

Suddenly he heard a sound outside.

Looking out, he could see dark forms moving along in the shadow of the high fence.

He drew back his head as quickly as possible.

Had he been seen?

Who were these skulking forms?

A cold sweat started upon the mulatto's forehead as these questions darted through his mind.

All was silent, and the rascal could hear the beating of his own heart.

No indications of their purpose had yet come from the dark forms outside, and there were still no sounds from his confederates.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

It will now be proper to notice briefly certain discoveries of consequence made by the detective, between the time of leaving Dr. Sanders in the morning and the receiving of Jenkins' notice.

He had visited Gunn's apartments over the shop.

The mulatto's wife was not there, but he had been told that she had gone to call upon a doctor, whose name he had also learned.

Thinking that an attempt was being made to get medical aid to the wounded ruffian, the detective hastened off to catch the surgeon, before he should have time to respond to the call.

What was his delight to find this person to be the barber's brother.

The man knew much of Pedro's rascality, and by playing skillfully upon his fears, Jenkins obtained a confession, which made it certain that the fellow had obtained the drug that had been given to Mrs. Coon from his brother, the doctor.

His connection with Dan Wolf was also demonstrated, and the latter's guilt a matter of certainty.

Nick was anxious to lay his hands on the ruffian, as he now had evidence enough to secure his conviction.

It was some time after this visit that he was warned by Jenkins of the desperado's expedition, and he waited expectantly for his second report.

The man had much difficulty in finding a telephone open at his second application, and Dan Wolf was well on his way to consult Slump before Nick Carter received the news.

Making his discovery known at the police station, three policemen were detailed to accompany him, for the purpose of making the arrests.

It was this party, increased by Jenkins, who had met them near at hand, that the mulatto had seen lurking among the trees.

Soon after his discovery of their presence in the yard, a man placed his hands on the window ledge and bounded into the room.

It was Nick Carter.

As he threw the light of the dark lantern into the mulatto's face Pedro began to swear violently.

"Stop that, you rascal," exclaimed the detective, as he signaled for his companions to enter. "Where is your pal?"

But the detective needed no direction, for the sounds of voices raised in anger, quickly followed by a confused struggle, came from the front of the house.

"They are murdering George!" exclaimed Jenkins, and he flew out of the room, swiftly followed by Nick Carter and two officers, leaving the wounded mulatto in charge of the third.

Slump and Dan had stolen silently through the deserted rooms until they reached the door of the apartment where Coon had been murdered.

Wolf was in the lead, but he paused as though to give way to his companion.

The door was open, and looking over the ruffian's shoulder, Slump could see the fugitive, who sat at one of the windows.

George was looking out of the window so intently that he did not hear the two men, who, indeed, had made very little noise.

Slump had been nudging his companion with his elbow for two or three seconds, but Dan hung back.

As the young man suddenly arose, and turned his glance full upon the door, the ruffian summoned up his resolution and sprang into the room.

"Back!" cried George. "Back, or you die!"

He recognized Dan Wolf, as he rushed upon him, and drew his pistol.

The hammer fell, but there was no explosion.

The next instant the ruffian was upon him.

He fought like a madman.

Of slighter build than Wolf, George seemed nerved by desperation to exertions he could not have made under other circumstances.

To and fro they struggled, the heroic Slump dancing around them with a pair of handcuffs in his hand.

Less occupied than the others, he was the first to hear the rapid tread of feet in the passage.

The next instant Jenkins rushed in, crying: "Here they are!" and threw himself upon Dan's back.

The latter shook him off as though he had been a child, and, with an oath, drew his revolver.

But, before he could use it, Nick Carter, closely followed by two stalwart policemen, ran into the room.

Dan uttered a snarl like a wild beast, and fell back a step, brandishing a revolver.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Nick, as Jenkins lighted the gas. "Hello, Slump! you here?"

"Yes; I'm here in the prosecution of my duty. I hold a warrant for the arrest of George Packer. That is the man," extending a stub forefinger at George, who had fallen back against the wall, panting from excitement and exertion. "I demand that you arrest him."

"All in good time, my friend," said the detective, calmly. "What are you doing with that pistol?" he cried, turning suddenly upon Wolf! "Would you commit another murder in this room?"

Dan shrank back aghast, and every drop of blood forsook his face.

"You lie!" he cried, hoarsely. "I've committed no murder."

"Put up your pistol."

Instead of obeying, Dan uttered a volley of oaths and started toward the door.

The policemen barred his passage.

"Out of my way!" howled the desperado.

"You're wanted, Wolf," answered one of the officers. "You had better give in."

"What am I wanted for? What have I done?" cried Wolf, drawing back a step. "I came here with Slump to help arrest this man—there's nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"Your accomplices have confessed," said the detective, sternly. "You murdered Coon, the pawnbroker."

Dan emitted a fearful howl, and leaped toward the window.

"D——n you!" he screamed, as he felt the detective's hand grasp his arm. "Take that!"

He fired as he spoke, but Jenkins knocked up his arm, and the bullet buried itself in the ceiling.

Despairing, cursing, struggling like a demon, Wolf was crushed to the floor by the very weight of numbers. He was handcuffed and helpless in an instant, and Nick Carter drew back with a satisfied air.

"I congratulate you," he said, extending his hand to Packer. "Evidence procured at a late hour this afternoon proves Dan Wolf guilty of the murder of Washington Coon."

The faithful Jenkins threw his hat in the air, and uttered a hearty hurrah.

George grasped the extended hand warmly, and the tears started to his eyes.

Wolf lay upon his back, his small eyes watching Nick Carter's face with fearful interest.

He realized that his doom was sealed, and a sullen gloom settled down upon his face.

* * * * * * *

The following day was a pleasant one to the detective. He received the congratulations of the authorities and the thanks of Mrs. Coon and her friends.

There was no longer any doubt as to Dan Wolf's guilt, although he still remained sullenly silent.

Pedro, the mulatto, had, however, made a confession, in which the manner of the pawnbroker's death was cleared up.

He had been engaged by Dan in the job, the ruffian pretending that burglary was his motive.

Dan had obtained a key to the house, and had a carefully drawn plan of the inside of the building.

The laudanum had been procured for the ostensible purpose of drugging the family, a branch of the affair which Wolf took upon himself.

Upon the night of the murder, the two villains had entered the house by the rear door, during the temporary absence of the girl, and had concealed themselves for several hours in a closet.

Finally, Dan had left his accomplice in the closet, and, having armed himself with the ax, as he passed through the woodshed, had stolen off, as he pretended, to discover if the drug had taken effect.

Gunn knew nothing of his actions until he had suddenly reappeared, and, calling him out, said that he had been discovered, and had hit the old man with the ax.

They had escaped over the fence in the rear, and he had afterward learned that Washington Coon had been killed.

Silas Coon and Jem Slump were arrested for complicity in the crime.

It clearly appeared that Silas had forged the letter produced by Slump, and that the latter had known that it was forged.

It could not be proved, however, that Silas had conspired against the life of his father, or that he had known of the deed contemplated by Wolf.

The fact that Seth Albers had already been charged with robbing his employer cast some doubts upon his testimony, and after a long and sensational trial, Silas and Slump were acquitted of the charge of murder.

Dan Wolf was sentenced to the electric chair, and his accomplice received his deserts at the same time.

Slump remained in Detroit, and soon afterward became implicated in an attempt to swindle a prominent business firm.

He was tried and sentenced to prison, and is now serving the State.

Seth Albers withdrew the confession into which he had been hurried by the wily Slump, and was lucky in escaping the consequences of his misdeeds.

Soon after the conclusion of the trial of Washington Coon's assassins, George Packer and Kate were married.

Nick Carter is now in New York City, in pursuit of those investigations which form the pleasures of his life.

THE END.

Nick Carter's next case started out in a most peculiar manner, for he was, so to speak, his own client. The picking of his pocket in a railroad train led to tremendous developments, however, and brought him into contact with one of the cleverest women swindlers he had ever encountered. It was an intensely interesting struggle throughout, and the whole story will be found splendidly narrated in No. 349, "Nick Carter on His Mettle; or, The Trapping of Cool Kate."

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For full particulars, see page 31.

How a Detective as a "Come On" Caught the Green Goods Men.

(By Isaac Grossman, New York City.)

Detective Dan Denton turned aside from investigating get-rich-quick frauds long enough to dress himself as a fictitious "come-on" in the greengoods business, to land "Red" Redson, one of the leaders in this form of swindling, in the police net.

"Joshua Perkins, of Connecticut," said Denton, "was the name I assumed, and I was made up as an old man to represent him. The greengoods men had been after him for several weeks. I obtained the 'confidential' letter sent to Perkins, and following the instructions, I registered at the —— Hotel. I walked up and down the corridor. I noticed a tall, slender fellow, whom I recognized as 'Reddy,' one of Mike Ryan's old steerers, sharply watching me.

"When he was satisfied I was all right, he came up and said, in a whisper: '$1,500 speedy fortune.' This was the password in the 'confidential' letter. I replied 'speedy fortune,' and the deal was on.

"Redson was completely fooled. He said we would have to go to Greenpoint, where the 'old man' had the money made from stolen government plates waiting for me. While crossing the Twenty-third Street ferry, 'Red' pointed out to me, among the sights worth seeing, the prisons on Blackwell's Island. When we reached the 'turning-off' place in Greenpoint, Officers O'Riley and McDouland dashed in, but the confederates were not caught. They had gotten a 'tip' and had skipped. I believe some of the gang recognized the officers, who were following 'Red' and me. Anyhow, we landed 'Red' Redson with the right evidence, and he will be sent to join Mike Ryan's nephew in Sing Sing.

P. S.—About a month later two men, flashily dressed, were caught playing the bunco game on a farmer, and were recognized as confederates of Redson, and will soon be sent up to keep that individual company.

The Capture of John Rone, the Boston Crook.

(By Hyman Lewis, Boston, Mass.)

One day, while I was walking in a large Boston business street, I came across a crowd of people watching a fakir. I thought I would stop to look, and see what he was doing. I managed to get in front of the crowd, and I was watching the trick he was doing. A man right across started to cough, and it called my attention to him. It was my employer, Mr. Brown.

He was smoking a good cigar, and was watching the trick being done by the fakir. I happened to notice a man right aside of Mr. Brown, a crook by the name of John Rone, the Boston thief and pickpocket. He tried to take from Mr. Brown his gold watch and chain, and he succeeded. The watch was worth one hundred and fifty dollars, and the chain fifty dollars.

As soon as he got the watch and chain, he made his way through the crowd and walked up the street, thinking he was safe. I went over to my boss and told him he was robbed of his gold watch and chain.

"We would better get after the crook, John Rone. He took it, and is now walking up the street." We left the crowd, and ran after the crook. While we were running, we happened to meet John Watts, the great Boston detective. We told him the story, and he joined us in the chase. We soon caught the crook, and he was arrested and sentenced for five years.

My boss got the jewelry back, and I was rewarded, and got a higher position in the place where I work.

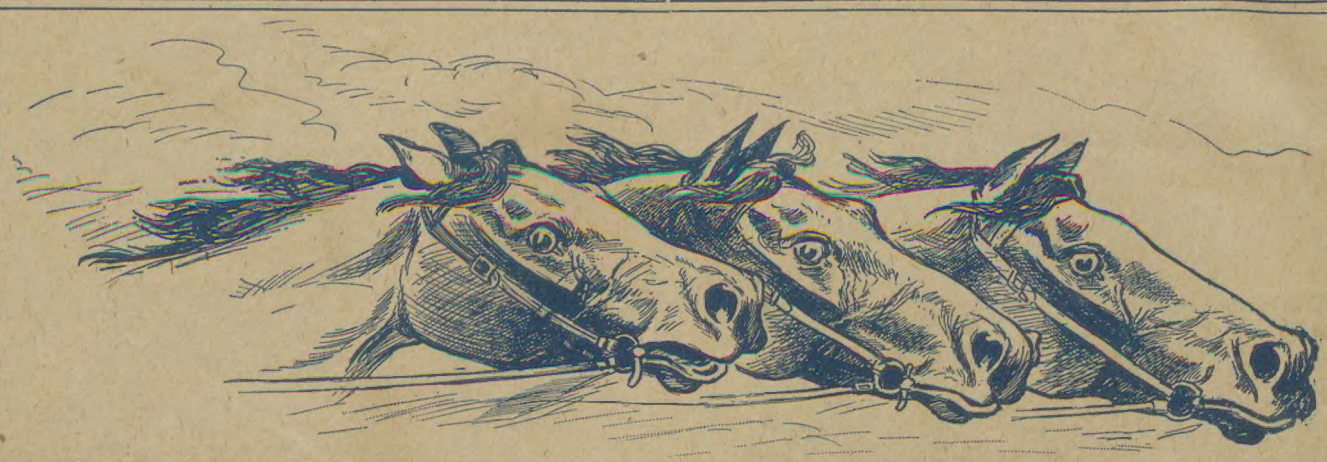
The Mysterious Ghost of the "Cuba."

(By George T. Petrie, New Haven, Conn.)

I and two followers took passage on the *James*. The crew were Spanish sailors. They belonged to a band of cutthroats. When about two days out, the Spanish captain struck me and I struck him back. When he recovered, he vowed he would kill me and my two followers. We took guns, and locked the door on him and his crew. One day he approached with a flag of truce, and said: "There is a boat abandoned, and her name is the *Cuba*." He said she had a very large cargo, and, as he was short of hands, he asked me and my two followers to take her into port for him. We consented, and we set out for her with two Spanish sailors. When we reached her, the Spanish sailors said they would go and get some food for us. When they reached their own boat, they got on and sailed away, leaving us on an old boat with holes in her sides. One night when we were asleep, and I was at the wheel, there arose from the hold the most loud, dismal sounds that I had ever heard. Bill, one of my followers, awoke, and went to see what was the matter. He did not return. So, about two hours later, a dim, white figure was seen, and when I looked at it, it melted into nothing. As my follower did not return, I sent Jack, my other follower, after him. As he did not return, I went in search of them. Coming to a hole in the deck, I went in, and

READ THIS!——IT'S IMPORTANT!

TIPS ON THE RACES



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